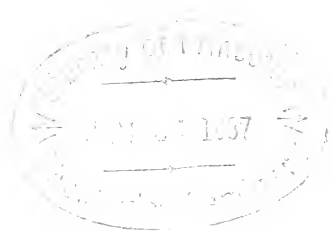




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MINOR CHARACTERS OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT.



MINOR CHARACTERS OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT.

BY
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PREFACE.



FIELD of study, animating in its pursuit, and almost indefinite in its extent, is to be found among the secondary or subordinate characters of the Old and New Testament. Behind the more prominent figures of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, vivid glimpses are to be obtained of many a true and noble nature, cast into com-

parative shadow by the brilliance of those greater lights.

An ordinary reader, with little help beyond that of his Concordance, may readily construct out of scattered allusions in the Gospels or the Epistles, the outline of biographies, full of an intrinsic interest, and fruitful in suggestions for modern thought and life. The present volume offers only a very limited selection from the materials at the disposal of the inquirer ; and, in order to give some coherence to its pages, the characters presented are drawn entirely from among the friends and comrades of the Apostle Paul.

If a few readers of the Bible are stimulated to become more diligent stu-

dents of its pages, and if some half-hours of the Sunday afternoon are redeemed from listlessness and languor, the expectations of the writer will be amply fulfilled.





ON
SOME OF THE MINOR CHARACTERS
OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

I.

ANANIAS OF DAMASCUS.

· Scripture references : Acts ix. 1-19 ; xxii. 1-16.

MOST readers of these pages have, at one time or another, watched a little steam-tug busily towing some great sailing ship down stream or out of harbour into the deep broad sea. To the spectator's eye, the tug is almost extinguished by the giant hull that floats behind. It returns unnoticed into port, while, observed of all observers, the big ship

spreads her white sails to the breeze, and, like a noble bird upon the wing, speeds her silent but majestic flight across the waves.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and the glorious work which he afterwards achieved, are among the household words of our Christian communities, and the fundamental evidences of our Christian faith. Every one is familiar with the start of that goodly vessel, with the voyages it made, and the precious cargoes which it carried back. But that ship also had its steam-tug. There was one man made by God the instrument of drawing Saul out, as a new creature in Christ Jesus, on his apostolic career. He appears at the crisis, does the work appointed to him, then vanishes, and we see him no more. What information we possess is to be gathered from the two parallel accounts given in the ninth and twenty-second chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. The result is full of interest, and cannot be devoid of instruction.

“There was a certain disciple at Damascus,

named Ananias." Damascus! The name carries us away across the Syrian desert to that ancient city, seated between its rushing streams, and in its fair oasis of grove and garden. How a Christian Church had grown together there we know not; but some of the scattered disciples may have fled thither after Stephen's death, and converts were doubtless added to them from among the native Jews, who formed a numerous and powerful synagogue. Thus far Jews and Christians seem to have lived on peaceable and even friendly terms, far removed from the heats and controversies of Jerusalem. Ananias himself was universally respected. He was known as "a devout man according to the law," and "had a good report of all the Jews which dwelt in Damascus." Such are the men whom our Lord loves to employ upon His errands, men of unblemished character, "sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

It does not follow that Ananias held any official

position in the church at Damascus. Tradition, indeed, has made him its bishop, and given him a history, crowned with a martyr's death ; but the conjecture is without foundation. We have quite as much right to consider him a private Christian, with no special gift of public speech or pastoral authority, but holding the warrant which belongs, as we conceive, to all disciples, to preach the gospel, to assure the anxious of forgiveness, and to baptize the believer. The kind of commission which was now to be confided to Ananias is only what may come to any one of us, and for which we should seek to be prepared. True, the Lord spoke to him "in a vision ;" but He may speak with equal emphasis by the whisper of His Spirit, or the indication of His providence ; and our attitude, like his, must be that of the girded loins and watchful eye—" Behold, I am here, Lord."

The work prepared for Ananias is now unfolded to him. A long street, straight as an arrow, used to run through the heart of Damas-

cus from east to west, and the line of it, though much broken, can still be traced. In that "street called Straight" stood a certain house, belonging to a well-known citizen, "the house of Judas;" and in that house there lies a blind man, wanting help, which Ananias is to give. The man is expecting him, indeed; for he too has had a vision, and it was a vision of such an one coming in, and laying healing hands upon his darkened eyes. And mark the motive urged for going. "Behold, he prayeth;" that is the sight which attracts the eye of the Lord, and ought to kindle the zeal of the disciples. Are you beginning to pray? Do the feelings of your heart find vent in broken sighs and whispered words of supplication? The ear of Christ has caught the sound. It comes floating up to the high heavens, through all the thunder of the angels' adoration, and the ceaseless murmur of the universe, heard as surely as an infant's cry reaches the mother's ear amidst the bustle of the house. He turns at the call, and His eye is straightway bent on the city, the

street, the house, the very room where you kneel in prayer. He sees you ; and where the eye of Jesus rests, there His heart, His hands, His feet are swift to follow. He will stir up some Ananias to come with words of help to you.

The street is called Straight, the house is the house of Judas, and so far all is plain ; but the man in the house—what is his name ? The sound of his name fell like a thunderbolt ; “ inquire for one called Saul of Tarsus.” A name too familiar in Christian ears ! Saul, the bigoted Pharisee, the furious persecutor, the blasphemer who taught others also to blaspheme ! It was he who had stood prominent at Stephen’s martyrdom, and who then, like a young tiger that had tasted blood, flew at the flock, and carried havoc, desolation, and death into the very heart of the Church. He had come to Damascus on the same brutal work, with authority to bind and imprison every Christian Jew. Shall Ananias put his head into the tiger’s mouth ? Shall he carry the pearl of the gospel

and cast it down at the feet of its bitterest calumniator? "Lord, I have heard by many of this man," and I had rather not have anything to do with him! How often has the same answer started to our lips at some distasteful call of duty. What is the use of exposing ourselves to insult and opposition? What but a miracle of grace will make such a man believe?

But these difficult errands are really our noblest opportunities. "Go thy way," Ananias; thou art to have part in a work with the fame of which the world shall ring! That persecutor is already turned from his fierce purpose; he has before him the destiny of a Christian apostle and martyr; he is to witness for the faith before kings and in distant heathen lands, and to suffer to the very death for the name which he before blasphemed. "He is a chosen vessel unto me." To that devout disciple it is granted to take Saul of Tarsus by the hand, to introduce him into the Church, and to send him forth upon his mission of self-sacrifice. May there be no such honours

waiting for us? John Bunyan was first enlightened by the simple Christian talk of some poor women, spinning on the summer's evening at their cottage doors. Sir Hope Grant is said to have been brought out of utter indifference by overhearing a group of private soldiers at prayer. The mouse lets loose the lion. Only let us cultivate simplicity and faith, and yield a prompt obedience to the call of duty, and to us too may fall some glorious trophy of divine favour; for the wolf, and the leopard, and the young lion shall lie down together in the kingdom of our Lord, "and a little child shall lead them."

Brave believer as he was, Ananias went his way, reached the house, and found the man. He seems like some skilful and friendly physician in his treatment of the difficult case. He shows us how to deal with the anxious and inquiring who may come under our eyes and seek aid at our hands.

The first thing that strikes us is the tenderness of his treatment. Here stands Ananias, face to

face with Saul the persecutor. Before him lies the man whose hands have been imbrued in Christian blood, and in whose wily head have been ripening cruel schemes for the extermination of the Church. He would have had Ananias himself in prison before now, if he had not been hindered. But it is all forgotten and forgiven by his visitor. Friendly hands are laid on those blind eyes, and a voice, full of pathos and pity, falls gently on the waiting ears. "Brother Saul!" It was the very salutation with which one Christian was wont to salute another. It breathed so different a spirit from the stiff and rigid Pharisæism of Judæa. It seemed to take in the poor forlorn sinner to a family fireside, with its warmth and light. Ay, if we want to do men good, they must be our "brothers" too. Never stand, like some old pillar-saint, on your high pedestal of virtue, and talk down to the people at your feet. Go and sit at their side; put your hands on them; make them feel at home with you; and even if you have to do with the most wicked,

speak to him as man to man, on the common footing of the love of God.

There is, moreover, a certain cheerful assurance to be noted in the tone which Ananias takes. He might have come to that chief of sinners robed in the blackness of darkness, and with stern words of condemnation on his lips. He comes with words of hope and with acts of blessing; "that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." He comes to tell him of the great mission on which he is to go, and the honour to be put upon him, as Christ's witness to the heathen world. The falling of the scales from Saul's eyes was but a symbol of the spiritual enlightenment which Ananias was permitted to bring to his benighted soul. Pardon and peace with God; mercy abounding over the darkest guilt, and melting the hardest heart; blessed service to spring from the joy of such salvation, and to be graciously accepted: this is the message which he bears, even to such an one as Saul. May I bear it, in

my turn? May I go to penitent men, and tell them of absolution and acceptance? What a commission we Christians have, and with what alacrity should it be done! Happy must be the surgeon who with delicate skill can give sight back to the blinded eye, and bid it look out once more on sky and earth, and springing flowers, and human faces. But higher and happier still the calling of the disciple, who may carry his Master's gospel to the bewildered heart, who may see the light of heaven dawn out of its darkness, and send forth a brother man rejoicing on his pilgrimage to the eternal sunshine of heaven.

Nor will Ananias reckon his task complete because he has shown his sympathy and delivered his message of mercy. There is a practical wisdom and faithfulness in his ministry to Saul well worthy our imitation. We preach the gospel to men, and then too often we let them go. We are so afraid of the taunt of proselytizing that we half shrink even from speaking of baptism or Church membership to the objects of our Christian

anxiety. The result is that there are so many converts who float from church to church, or who affect to be above all human fellowships of religion. It matters much to a young disciple that he should be clearly told what to do next. It mattered much to Saul. And now to his own eager inquiry, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" comes the appropriate answer, "Arise and be baptized," as a pledge of faith and a token of forgiveness; and then, "join thyself to the disciples." Was it not a joyful day when Ananias entered the Christian assembly, leading by the hand that changed and humbled man, and witnessed the good profession which he made? And have you found an anxious soul, and been the means of guiding it to Christ? That is good; but now complete your work. Bring your friend into the Church. Bring him among fellow-Christians, whose experience may instruct and edify him, and with whom he may find a spiritual home. Prevail on him to settle down as a member of some such brotherhood. Some indeed

may accuse you of being animated by a sectarian or party bias. Others may despise you for what they call your want of breadth. But your Lord will see the singleness of your aim, and honour it ; and your brother will live to bless you for not leaving him to wander in the wilderness, but bringing him within the camp, where the tribes of Israel are gathered, and the ark of the Lord abides.





II.

BARNABAS.

Scripture references : Acts iv. 34-37 ; ix. 26-28 ; xi. 19-26 ;
xiii. xiv. xv. ; Gal. ii. 1-13.

SECOND names, or surnames, become necessary as soon as men attempt to force themselves into societies. They are then no longer adequately distinguished by the simple "James" or "John," for others also bear the same name. Some personal characteristic, therefore, has in each case to be selected : the trade, or the stature, or the complexion, or the disposition of the man will suggest a title for him ; he becomes known to his fellows as James the Smith, or as John the

Black, and probably transmits the surname to his posterity.

When our Lord chooses his apostles, they have to be distinguished in this way. There is Judas Iscariot, and there is Judas the brother of James. There is Simon Zelotes, and there is Simon surnamed Peter. Thomas is called Didymus. James and John are known as the sons of Zebedee, or by a name of the Lord's own bestowment, the sons of Thunder. After the Ascension, the apostles in their turn give surnames to many of their more eminent fellow-labourers. We have an instance in hand in which the second name has not only taken the place of the first, but thrust it almost out of recollection. "Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas," is from that time known as Barnabas alone. For Joses was one of the commonest Jewish names, and Barnabas had a meaning peculiarly characteristic of the man. Our English translation interprets it as "the son of consolation." Take "consolation" in a

strong sense, and that is right. The word employed is elsewhere rendered "exhortation." It answers to the old English use of "comfort," in the sense of strengthening, as well as soothing, as we have it in the phrase, "the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost." Perhaps we shall best understand the name by surveying the incidents of the history.

We know little of the antecedents of Barnabas. He was a native of Cyprus, the island that to the Hebrew vision lay like the first stepping-stone across the great sea to the lands of the Gentiles. Its population was partly Greek, partly Oriental; and the kind of education which such a society would afford may have helped to make Barnabas a broader man than those Jews who had been born and bred in the closer atmosphere of Jerusalem. But he was himself a Jew, and of the tribe of Levi. Tradition marks him out as among the seventy sent forth by Christ. In fact, he may have been one of the first-fruits of the apostolic preaching at

Pentecost. Some of those converts, we know, were "men of Cyprus and Cyrene."

His first appearance has more of action in it than of speech. It was at the moment when, under the fresh impulses of their awakening, the disciples who had "houses or lands" were parting with their property for the relief of their poorer brethren, suddenly cut off from the ordinary means of maintenance. Conspicuous among these was Barnabas ; for "having an estate, he sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet." He is the only man mentioned by name among those generous givers. Was it because what he did, he did with such heartiness and genuine humility as to serve for an example to the whole Church? It was a good beginning for a Christian ministry. "Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

The interest deepens as we proceed. Six or seven years have passed, and the Church has scarcely recovered from the shock of the great

persecution. Barnabas is still in Jerusalem, occupying a position which enables him to take a most important part at a critical time. An unlooked-for and almost unwelcome proselyte has presented himself. It is Saul, the Pharisee, the notorious persecutor who has sworn to extirpate the sect of the Nazarenes, root and branch, from the sacred soil. Converted at Damascus, he applies for fellowship at Jerusalem. But he finds himself an object of alarm and undisguised mistrust. The disciples will not believe him. The apostles hesitate to move. The way is opening for a schism, the most fatal we can conceive, between them and this "last of the apostles," who seeks their sympathy indeed, but who can dispense with it, strong in his own independent authority, and in the promised presence of the Lord. There was needed at that moment some well-known and trusted leader, liberal and large-hearted enough to become surety for the former persecutor, and to stand his friend. That friend was found in Barnabas.

It was he who joined Peter's hand with Paul's. It was he who told the tale of the wonderful conversion, in such a manner as to dissolve all doubt. The "son of consolation" appears here at his appropriate work, reconciling those opposing forces with the sweet reasonableness of his own gentler spirit.

He was selected, shortly afterwards, for a mission in which the same spirit would find scope. Tidings had reached the apostles of strange successes attending the gospel in Antioch, the famous Greek city in Northern Syria. Some of the scattered brethren had been "preaching the Lord Jesus" to the heathen population there, and the number of conversions had been surprising. The church at Jerusalem was not prepared for such an event. The baptism of Cornelius had indeed opened the door to heathen men; but that was in obedience to a direct revelation from heaven to the chief of the apostles, and this larger movement appeared unauthorized, and might prove unwarranted.

Barnabas was accordingly chosen to visit the spot, and make inquiry: and to Antioch he went. Now it is not altogether easy for any man to give unstinted commendation to a work in which he himself has had no share. The critic's habit is apt to be too strong, even for the Christian. He will expatiate on the objectionable incidents of the awakening rather than on its solid success. He will point out what might have been done better, rather than what has been done well. Finely in contrast with that tendency stands out the candid and generous behaviour of Barnabas. He "saw the grace of God;" a divine work, which none could overthrow, which none might overlook. He "was glad," with an unfeigned delight, and expressed himself in terms of warm congratulation and approval. Nay, he threw his own energies into the glorious enterprise, and "exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord." When he departed he left many further converts added to the infant church, and

an impression of his own character which the narrative preserves in the memorable words, "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." The son of exhortation has proved also the son of comfort, of edification, of strength.

There is no room to enlarge upon the weighty controversies and the perilous missionary journeys, in which, shortly after the incidents last noticed, Barnabas became associated with Paul. It was by his urgency that Paul was brought from the seclusion of his native Tarsus, and introduced to the field of work which lay ready for him in Antioch. It was through his generous co-operation that the ministry of the Apostle of the Gentiles found favourable opportunities of exercise. But from that hour the lustre of his name begins to pale beside the fervent and forward energy of his incomparable companion. He is no longer "the chief speaker." The practical command passes gradually into the stronger hands of Paul. While Paul is represented by

the historian as on a conquering march through heathen lands, Barnabas retires into the obscurity of his native island, and is heard of no more. Some would even see in the account of their separation the evidence of a growing envy on the part of Barnabas, unable longer to endure his inferior position. We may read that account, however, in another light. We find in the history no trace of any jealousy ; but rather tokens of a noble modesty, akin to that of the Baptist when he drew back into the shade before the perfect light of Christ. This man, who, when others shunned Paul, had become his patron and protector, laying him under no common obligation, is now content to yield the precedence, and to walk loyally and lovingly at his side. There was no backwardness on the part of Barnabas in the perils and enterprises which he shared with Paul. He too lifted up his voice at Paphos, in the synagogue at Antioch, in the towns of Lycaonia. He ran his risks at the hands of the unbelieving Jews. He stood steadfast at his comrade's side in the

face of the fierce opposition from the bigoted Pharisees at Jerusalem. When at length they differed—if we have to choose between the two—surely it was Barnabas who erred upon the generous side; for what he did was to take a faint-hearted brother whom Paul was too impatient to endure, and to give him that fresh chance of honourable service which made Mark “profitable” ever afterwards to Christ and to His Church.

Now we may understand, in some degree, the type of character which Barnabas represents. It is one which will be variously estimated, according to the disposition of the valuer. “He had not the genius of Paul,” says one writer, “but in the true hierarchy of souls, in which goodness is the rule of merit, may he not occupy even a loftier rank?” That is perhaps an unduly favourable comparison; but all will acknowledge the peculiar charm which attaches to the true “son of consolation.” There are men who everywhere leave behind them a sense of irritation,

like winds that blow dust into face and eyes. They are the opposites to Barnabas. There was sunshine where he came. His was the influence that heals, like wine and oil from the flasks of the good Samaritan. At his approach the feeble gathered strength, and trembling souls crept out of their hiding toward the light. Hard words were hushed in his company ; the sternest grew gentle, and the very churl tried to be liberal. Yet it would be a mistake to suspect him, and men like him, of moral weakness and irresolution. The sunshine has its strength, as well as the wind, though it makes much less noise. Barnabas was once, to Paul's great wonder, "carried away by the dissimulation" of others ; but his very wonder—"even Barnabas!"—shows how unusual the symptom was. For "sons of consolation" are also sons of strong encouragement, who can themselves burn against injustice or hypocrisy, and inspire others with a kindred zeal. It is significant that heathen men "called Barnabas Jupiter," the name that embodied

their poor conceptions of what was greatest and best, most fatherly, and most benignant.

We recognize the presence of such men in our own generation, and among the fathers and brethren in our own Israel. The temper of the moment may not tend to exalt them, or to press their example on our imitation. The sterner gifts may be mostly in request ; the call may be for sons of thunder, sons of fire, with power to clear the air and to consume the adversary. We watch with mingled awe and admiration as some impetuous missionary spirit sweeps by, rousing the dull church to a measure of its own activity. We applaud the controversialists, who, on one side and the other, contend for separate sides of truth, or for principles which they reckon overlooked. No doubt there is great need of them. Is there not need also of "the son of consolation," and may he not do as good a work as they? Surely it is not below the ambition of the strongest to play the part of Barnabas among the churches of to-day. He

must be content in that case to be comparatively unnoticed, and to leave a fainter impression on the general world. He will not appear among the heroes, like Elijah ; but will be rather like Elisha, the homely and holy man of God, passing by on his daily errands of duty. But as long as so many timid, undecided souls remain, needing the tenderest touch and a patience almost motherlike to bring them to decision ; as long as there are little children to be drawn into the Saviour's arms ; as long as the Church has her backsliders to reclaim, and her doubters to direct and encourage : so long there will be ample occupation for such a man, and abundant reward. Nor will he live in vain, but rather to the highest purpose, if he be made instrumental, like Barnabas, in dissipating suspicions, and confirming friendships, between Christian brethren. Differences must exist where men are conscientious. He who exhorts us to ignore them provokes our contempt ; but he who, recognizing them, strives to bring us together on the broader basis of a common faith, in the warmer

atmosphere of a personal intimacy, deserves our gratitude. Enterprises of that kind require a world of tact, perseverance, and self-forgetfulness. There may be little present honour reaped from them. But there is one encouragement, weightier than all besides: "Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God."

It is a career open to all who have the one needful qualification of a brotherly Christian spirit. Genius they may have none; in power of speech, in practical talent, even in constitutional energy, they may feel themselves defective. "He was a great man" will, perhaps, never be said of them. They have their calling, nevertheless. "Comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." That is the path which our Lord Himself has trodden, and sanctified for ever. That is the life which leaves behind it a memory, fragrant as the scent of hidden flowers, "He was a good man, a son of consolation."



III.

JOHN MARK.

Scripture references : Acts xii. 12-17, 25 ; xiii. 1-13 ;
xv. 36-41 ; Coloss. iv. 10 ; Philemon 24 ; 1 Peter v. 13 ;
2 Timothy iv. 10, 11.

WHEN Peter, freed from prison, found himself alone in the dark Jerusalem lanes, he stood, we are told, "considering" what next to do. His natural impulse was to find out his friends, and tell them of his rescue. Where, however, should he find them at that dead hour of night? What house in the city was most like home to him? The answer is forthcoming. "When he had considered, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were

gathered together praying." That is our first introduction to the character whose changes we now propose to contemplate.

"John whose surname was Mark." Two names are here, one Jewish, the other Roman ; the latter adopted at first as a secondary one, and gradually superseding the former, just as "Joses" grew into "Barnabas," and "Saul" became universally known as "Paul." Thus in one place we have "John," and in another "John, whose surname was Mark ;" but later in the same chapter plain "Mark," and always afterwards "Mark" or "Marcus," the Jewish name being entirely gone.

The scenes of this man's youth are not difficult to imagine. His father is never mentioned, but his mother is of note in the Christian community at Jerusalem. She has a house commodious enough to receive a number of its members when they desire to meet, and popular enough to attract them. She has servants ; the name of one of them we know, "Rhoda," or "Rose ;" and

the home is probably one of competence and comfort. There would meet, on various occasions, the choicest spirits of the early Church. Barnabas was Mary's nephew, and would often be her guest ; and Barnabas was then the leader of the more liberal section of Christians, and one of the kindest and most generous of men. Peter, as we saw, must have been an intimate personal friend. We find traces of these connections far on in the Epistles. " Marcus, sister's son " (or rather cousin) " to Barnabas," is the designation given to him in the Epistle to the Colossians, and in Peter's first Epistle he is called " Marcus my son," no doubt in the spiritual sense, as Timothy stood related to Paul. On grounds like these Mary must have been held in high consideration ; and she was herself a devout and courageous woman, ready, even in that time of persecution when Herod's sword was loose, with a welcome for all who loved the Lord.

It was a fine moral atmosphere for a youth to breathe : a godly mother, praying friends,

missionaries and martyrs and apostles coming and going there ; and a bracing one withal, with frequent winds of fierce opposition raging around. Something it must have been to be a son in the house to which Peter came that night, with the mark of the chains fresh upon his wrists, and the light of the angel's presence still reflected from his face : something to have been in the company when cousin Barnabas brought in a stranger, insignificant in appearance and awkward in address, and introduced him as the dreaded Saul of Tarsus, changed to a beloved brother, and a fervent fellow-labourer ! But, so far, we have proceeded mainly on conjecture. Mark's recorded history begins about the year A.D. 44, the era of the earliest mission to the heathen ; and in what follows we will yield ourselves to the guidance of the scattered allusions in the Scriptures.

Our starting-point is Antioch, the great commercial capital of Syria, and the second birthplace of Christianity. A flourishing and

energetic church, we have seen, is gathered there. Barnabas and Paul are among its foremost teachers ; and Mark, wearied, we may suppose, of the monotonous life at Jerusalem, and eager for adventure, has come to join them. He must already have been recognized as a converted man. And when those two friends have been solemnly set apart for mission work, it is settled that Mark shall accompany them. He is styled their "minister," or servant. It was the excellent custom of the older evangelists to associate the younger with them ; just as Moses chose Joshua for his assistant, and Elisha "poured water on the hands of Elijah." The design was to inure them to the discipline of the missionary life, and to instruct them in its duties. It was the squire learning to win his spurs in the Christian chivalry by attendance on the knight who had won them already. And what could be more suitable, or full of promise, than that Mark should serve his first campaign under Barnabas, his elder kinsman and friend,

a man of such a noble, enterprising spirit, and yet so full of all gentleness and grace ?

But what sudden change is this, occurring when that missionary journey has been but a little while begun ? “ John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.” Short words, but how significant, and how disappointing ! Can he be already weary in well-doing ? Has he had only time to visit Cyprus, to sail across to Asia Minor, and will he so soon repent and return ? After witnessing the awful judgment on Elymas, and the glorious conversion of Sergius Paulus ; after seeing how Paul could smite, and how Barnabas could heal ; after feeling some thrill of holy emulation in his own bosom, does he now give up the Christian work ? What motive can have turned him back ?

Matthew Henry gives the answer in his own quaint fashion : “ Either he did not like the work, or he wanted to go see his mother.” A fit of home-sickness, in fact ! A shrinking from the distance, and the danger : once up among

yonder rugged highlands of Pisidia, with their perils of waters and perils of robbers, what prospect would there be of ever seeing Jerusalem and Mary's house again? Perhaps also Paul, himself so hardy and self-sacrificing, was a little impatient with the young man, and treated him with an outspoken severity not pleasant to endure.

But in any case it was a most unworthy desertion of duty, and we shall hear of it again. Mark was no traitor, for his heart was true at bottom; but he was at present a coward, too soft to suffer hardship, and he had forgotten to count the cost. A failure, it would seem; a hand taken from the plough; a ship, scarcely out of dock, and already stranded on the shore! What a sorrow to that noble mother to see her son return like this; better he had been borne home dead upon his shield than have cast it away in dishonourable flight. A feeble, fickle, untrustworthy man, must we say? Yes; "he departed from us," is Paul's indignant verdict, "and went not with us to the work."

Five years must be supposed to pass. Barnabas and Paul have accomplished their journey, and returned. The great conflict with the Pharisaic party at Jerusalem has been fought out. The two missionaries are panting to be at work again. And of all men, who should appear, applying to accompany them, but the deserter Mark ?

Paul has never seen him since that unhappy parting at Perga ; and he does not mean to be deceived a second time. Barnabas must do as he thinks right, but Paul will rather break their own old companionship, and go by himself. Then Barnabas will break it too. Barnabas takes the milder, more hopeful, more indulgent view ; he has probably heard better things of his young cousin during the recent visit to Jerusalem, and sees some new fire and fervour in the man, which he, at least, will not quench. The decision of the "son of consolation" is to give him another chance. "And so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus."

How often has that "other chance" been

the making of a man ! Has he failed in the first charge you intrusted to him ? Try him, however, with a second. Did he forsake you at the very moment when the need of him was greatest, and leave you to serve alone ? Still there may be good in him ; and is it not God's own way with men to have long patience, and to prove us again and again before He gives us up ?

Another blank occurs here. We lose sight for ten years of Barnabas and Mark. Barnabas may be dead ; and Mark, has he failed again, and has his name been erased from the annals of the Church ? No, it appears again, after that long interval, and, singularly enough, it appears in two of the Epistles of Paul, those addressed from Rome to the Colossians and to Philemon. The passages are worth consulting by those who would appreciate the change of tone and feeling which they indicate.

Marcus, in these letters, is clearly identified with our own Mark by his relationship to Barnabas. But can it be the same man ? Where is

the useless, untrustworthy character of whom we were obliged to get rid? Another stamp is set now upon his name by the very hand that was once ready to brand "deserter" there. "My fellow-prisoner," says Paul. He has the courage then, at least, to brave hardship for the Gospel's sake. "A comfort unto me," a strong support, as Barnabas himself was wont to be. "My fellow-labourer," the highest praise of all from one who laboured so hard and so well; a trusty comrade, fit to go on Paul's own errand, and with Paul's special commendation, to the church at Colosse! "Touching Mark, ye received commandment; if he come unto you, receive him."

Surely our stranded ship floats again! Our fallen brother has lifted himself up, with heaven's help, and is on his own feet, pressing forward with as stout a heart as the bravest. Barnabas was right; there was a true heart in the man after all.

We turn to the first Epistle of Peter, the date

of which must be somewhere near that of the Epistles last mentioned ; here also Mark's name is recorded, and where is Mark now ? At Babylon, in the distant East ; what an indefatigable traveller he has grown, and what a heart has he for labour ! With whom is he found ? With aged Peter, the friend of his early youth, the instrument of his conversion, his father in the faith. And what impressions does he leave behind him ? The best ; all the warm confidence of Simon Peter's heart is in that one phrase, " Marcus, my son." Ay, a Christian worthy of apostolic approval ; born to God under his mother's roof in far Jerusalem twenty years ago, and now a man in Christ Jesus, grown to a full stature and a masculine strength !

Presently Paul is writing again ; it is the last of all his letters, the second to Timothy, despatched during that second term of his imprisonment at Rome, which was so much closer and sharper than the first. His friends have left him ; he is cold, and he is ill, and, with all his

steadfast faith in the Divine support, he craves for a little human sympathy. Therefore let Timothy, if it may be, come quickly from Ephesus, where he is, bringing cloak and parchments, and his own filial care ; and let him bring also some other tried and trusty brother, as a second source of consolation. Who, then, shall the chosen one be ? “ Take Mark, and bring him with thee ; ” a useful man, a “ profitable ” man, the very man for a minister, a servant, a friend ! Mark, the runaway ? Mark, rather than have whom in my company, I forfeited my dear companionship with Barnabas ? Even him ; for years have passed since then, and the timid stripling has become the resolute and energetic veteran ; none better now, none worthier, and few indeed so good. Yes, let me have him to tend my hard confinement, to go out with me on the day when I must die, to witness my end, and to lay my body in its resting-place !

One further reference remains, a large and a long one ; for it is a whole book of Scripture,

“the Gospel according to Mark.” How that evangelist gathered his materials, and ordered his narrative, does not now concern us. All the early traditions agree in attributing to Mark, as the scribe and interpreter of Peter, that shortest life of Jesus, with its peculiar charm of graphic, pithy, picturesque representation, which the Church would not willingly let die. And thus the image which remains is not that of the fugitive youth, but of the missionary, the faithful companion of the chief Apostles, and one among the four evangelists.

On the northern coast of Devon there spreads a bay, along which the sea comes tide after tide, washing a broad beach of tiny shells. Shells are there innumerable ; but you may search the shore for hours, and find no perfect specimen : the shells are broken. I can conceive many a disheartened traveller in life’s hard journey sitting down on that beach, and saying, “Behold the image of my own experience, of my broken resolutions, unaccomplished purposes, and per-

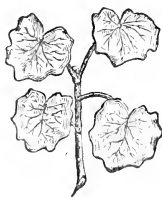
petual failures !” Even in the Christian Church there are not a few who feel that they have failed of the high aims, the noble impulses, which warmed and quickened them at first !

To any such disheartened souls this story of Mark’s recovery should come like a trumpet call of hope. Too late, say you, to join the ranks once more, to become men of high attainment, heavenly character, and fervent spirit ; too late to win the brighter crown, and the more abundant entrance ? Never too late, while life lasts.

“ Death closes all ; but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done.”

Stronger than the oldest habit of evil is the Spirit of God poured into the willing human heart. You, too, though now like Saul you hide trembling among the stuff, have a royal part that you may play, and a heavenly prize that you may win. Once more to the front ! If Paul does not trust you, Barnabas will. If Paul does not care

for you now, he may come to lean on you with all his strength. And One, of whom you know, clearer-sighted by far than that shrewd Apostle, tenderer of heart than that "son of consolation," marks your struggles, and prays for your success; and He, as you arise, will breathe into your ear those words of unutterable hope and encouragement, "Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more."





IV.

TIMOTHEUS.

Scripture references : Acts xiv. 6-23 ; xvi. 1-3 ; 1 Corinth. iv. 17 ; xvi. 10-11 ; Phil. ii. 19-23 ; 1 Thess. iii. 1-6 ; Heb. xiii. 23 ; and the Epistles to Timothy.

THE first of Paul's missionary journeys reached its furthest limit at Lystra, a town of Lycaonia, high up in the interior of Asia Minor. The place was one of the most uncivilized he ever visited ; the people were heathens of the ruder sort, fickle, headstrong, and intensely superstitious. They began by offering divine honours to the missionaries, and they ended by stoning Paul, as they supposed, to death. Even in Lystra, however, he

left a band of converts, duly formed into a church of Christ. And when, after a year or two, he came that way a second time, he found the little church standing steadfast, and among its members a youth of peculiar promise, who bore the now famous name of Timothy. "Then came he to Derbe and Lystra; and behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus."

The historian, having thus introduced him to our notice, proceeds at once to his parentage, which was a remarkable one. On the mother's side, Timothy was born a Jew. Both mother and grandmother appear to have been devout students of the Hebrew Scriptures, earnest and sincere in their religion. They had been among the early converts at Lystra. They had trained the child of their love in the learning of their people, and in the fear of their God. It is the more surprising to be told that "his father was a Greek," and probably a heathen. Mixed marriages were held in horror by orthodox Jews. At Lystra, however, Jews of any kind were few,

and the rigour of custom must have been relaxed. Timothy himself, when Paul met with him, had never been circumcised. But what might escape remark in Lycaonia, would prove a scandal to the stricter Jews elsewhere ; and it is to be noted, as an instance of his practical judgment, that Paul, in order to avoid the scandal, "took and circumcised him" before he led him forth to work.

The spiritual ancestry of Timothy seems to be almost as clearly marked as the natural. He must have been prepared for the willing reception of the gospel by the godly education of his childhood, and had probably never passed through any crisis of conversion. If, however, we rightly appreciate the force of the expression used by Paul, "my own son in the faith," we must attribute to the influence of the Apostle's first visit his decision to follow Christ. In the interval between that visit and the second, he had advanced to a character of marked ability and usefulness. The brethren, not at Lystra only,

but Iconium, spoke well of him. Some did not hesitate to predict for him a foremost place among the soldiers of the Cross. Paul, always on the watch for helpers, examined the grounds of that opinion, and confirmed it. He saw the materials lying ready for a noble missionary life, worthy to be reduced to order under his own eye. "Him would Paul have to go forth with him." And with this period we connect the numerous allusions in the two Epistles which bring up to Timothy's recollection what we should call his ordination service. The church appears gathered in solemn assembly. There are the mother and the grandmother of the young probationer. There are some of the heathen comrades with whom he has played as a boy and studied as a man. He makes his declaration of faith and purpose, "a good profession before many witnesses." Then the Apostle, speaking as a veteran speaks to a recruit, explains the labours and the risks of the Christian warfare, and charges his "son" to be brave, patient, and believing. The

laying on of hands succeeds ; Paul's hands are placed on Timothy's head, and those of all the elders ; and the prayer of the united church rises to heaven on his behalf. Nor does it rise in vain ; for to that moment is referred the special anointing of the Spirit which fitted the young man for his future ministry. " The gift of God " came with the laying on of hands ; and, amid smiles and tears, we see him going forth into the great world, in the footsteps of the Captain who had chosen him to be a soldier. Well for the Christian minister, who, through the vicissitudes of his life, can look back on some impressive service of that kind, when he too was separated to his work, and commended, in brotherly affection, to the Spirit's all-sufficient grace. Priestly power of consecration we heartily disavow ; but we may prize and we may practise, none the less, every ordinance which tends to deepen our feeling of ministerial responsibility, and to bind us to our Master's side.

The work which Timothy found cast upon

him constantly widened in range and in importance. He was very young when he went out with Paul; and it was fitting that he should at first remain in the background, a witness of Paul's achievements, a minister to his wants, and a diligent learner from his example. From the outset there was much for him to witness, to learn, and to emulate. The Acts of the Apostles, from the sixteenth chapter to the nineteenth, record the very noblest exploits of the Gospel ministry; and Timothy was present at Philippi, at Thessalonica, at Corinth, and at Ephesus. He did not appear prominent in the preaching; he was passed over in the persecutions. But, from references in the Epistles, we discover how usefully and industriously he was employed. From Corinth he is sent to the suffering Thessalonians, "to establish and comfort them in their faith." From Ephesus he is sent to the contentious Corinthians "to bring them into remembrance" of the truth they seemed to have forgotten. Constantly we hear of him

at Paul's side, "my work-fellow," "my fellow-labourer," "as a son with his father, serving in the gospel." He passed through his apprenticeship in a loyal and loving spirit; and presently, like other good apprentices, he rose to be a master, with enterprises of his own. Higher work will always be ready for the man who does the lower work modestly and well. Still comparatively young, he is left at Ephesus with an herculean task on his hands; he has to organize the churches in all that district, to "ordain elders," to "do the work of an evangelist," and at the same time to guard the faith against the active assaults of a spurious philosophy. He becomes the recognized successor of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, invested with an authority hardly inferior to his own. When that Apostle's end draws near, and he seeks some one to be the comforter of his last days, and the trusted executor of his last thoughts and purposes, it is to Timothy that the summons is sent, in language of eager fatherly affection. Whether

he reached Rome in time to undertake the desired offices, is left untold ; but we learn, from the Epistle to the Hebrews, that the honour of suffering imprisonment for Christ fell also to his share, and, if tradition is to be trusted, he died at last a martyr's death in the streets of his own turbulent Ephesus.

With little beyond allusions to guide us, it is difficult to decide on the precise qualities of character which distinguished Timothy from other men. His bodily health was feeble, and required stimulants ; his natural disposition appears to have been as sensitive as Paul's, and perhaps deficient in forwardness and courage. Some have urged that he must have been of a cowardly and time-serving spirit, adducing, as a proof, the repeated exhortations in the Epistles addressed to him to be strong and steadfast. These exhortations, however, must not be unduly pressed. The situation of affairs at Ephesus was at the time extremely difficult and even dangerous. Heathenism was as fierce and as vigilant

as when Demetrius led the rioters against Paul. Heresy, in its most pernicious forms, was noisily asserting itself. The bravest might easily have lost heart in such an atmosphere, and would have needed to sustain him every motive which an Apostle could supply. Paul did not think meanly of his follower. On the contrary, he speaks of his unfeigned faith, his unwearied service, his strict fidelity, "the proof of him" as a man weighed in the balance and found to be of sterling weight. He calls him by the dearest names, "my brother," "my son," "my dearly beloved son," and entreats the special kindness of the churches on his behalf. He declares, in one place, that in all the chosen band of his fellow-labourers there is none so disinterested as Timothy, none so full of sympathy, none so much after his own heart. High praise from such a pen as Paul's! For it marks out this man at the age, we may suppose, of thirty or thirty-five, as the leader among all his comrades in the faith. And he led, be it observed, not because of

his natural forwardness, for he had none ; nor yet apparently from any great intellectual mastery, for he seems to have shrunk from controversy : but by dint of his sheer goodness, unselfishness, and trust in God. More dazzling names than his are to be seen in the firmament of the early Church ; Apollos flames across the sky, leaving behind the brilliant sparks of his Alexandrian rhetoric : but the star of Timotheus beams on with a gentle, gracious, and unfading lustre, holding forth the word of life. His was one of those attractive Christian characters which, with little outward show or sound, shine by the very necessity of their inner light. “ Blessed are the poor in spirit ; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Whatever, then, the contrast between Timothy's peculiar mission and the current of our common life, his character is one which, in its strength, its modesty, and its devotedness, may be ours. Character is a building of which God is the architect, and all the designs are His.

But the building rises stone on stone, and is the work of many different hands ; and it is useful to inquire what particular influences we can trace as helping to make this man what he was.

One powerful element in his education was the Bible. "From a child" it had been his great lesson-book ; its milk had nourished his spiritual infancy, and its meat sustained his spiritual manhood. And now, in this great age of making books, where, by common confession, is there a book that will do for character what the Bible does ? "Men cannot do without it," writes Matthew Arnold ; "for they want happiness, and happiness is the result of righteousness, and righteousness is to be found in the Bible." "I have put a New Testament among your books," said Charles Dickens to his son, "because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature can possibly be guided." Dr. Chalmers has left it on record, "If I were asked to specify the likeliest prescription for the well-being of the soul, I should say it was a prayerful

reading of the Bible." A Bible Christian is a strong Christian. He escapes the perpetual religious childhood in which too many are content to live and die. The breezes of scepticism do not break his cable. The shocks of life do not destroy his faith. By daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures he waxes riper and stronger, deeper and yet broader, at once a scholar and a soldier, a "man of God, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Yes, if we would grow, there is no better secret than the old-fashioned plan of a regular, orderly, prayerful study of the Bible.

No less helpful were the personal influences for good with which Timothy was surrounded. The Bible is the best of books; but the character of those who teach it adds immensely to its power. Now the earliest Scripture-lessons of Timothy's youth were mingled with the happy associations of hours spent at the feet of his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Their explanations had made the sacred stories delightful, and had sweetened as well as simplified

the sacred truths. When they and he were parted, the same good work was carried on by apostolic hands. Paul became his instructor, as he was already his father, in the Gospel. In those hallowed hours of private intercourse which the intervals of labour must often have afforded, Paul had led the young disciple forward from fact to fact, and from doctrine to doctrine, till he stood rooted and grounded in the truth. How much the scholar owed, in this instance, to the inspiration which he caught from the teacher! How much may still be done, even by the uninspired, to impart interest and impressiveness to the Word of God! The desire to see her child become another Timothy lives in many a Christian mother's heart: does not the power to make him so, under the divine blessing, lie largely in her hands? The anxiety that our younger members should grow to be accomplished and experienced in the things of God is one that finds frequent utterance from the lips of their elders: cannot those elders do much to mend the defects which they deplore? It would

be a noble calling, and the opportunities are at hand. The Bible class, wisely conducted, becomes the very garden of the Lord, where the young plants are nourished to a full stature and strength. Nor are there wanting in private still more precious occasions for instructing more perfectly those who, fervent in spirit, are yet comparatively unfurnished in mind. Our children, our servants, our young acquaintances, wait for such friendly guidance to be lifted out of their spiritual inexperience. They will reward it by their hearty gratitude and appreciation. They will hasten to bless the kindly voice that taught them what they knew not, and cheered them onward in the paths of understanding.

“For what delights can equal those
Which stir the spirit’s inner deeps,
When one who loves, but knows not, reaps
A truth from one who loves and knows?”

Yet, after all, the main human force at work in the formation of Timothy’s character was Timothy himself: for the determining will was his own. He had the humility to listen and to

learn, the candour to accept, the decision to choose, and the patience to endure. These were God's gifts to him ; but he cherished them, he held them fast, and he increased them by practice : and therefore he profited by his advantages, and became what we have seen him to be. Nor will it be ever otherwise. Success in life, secular or spiritual, depends not so much on the number of our advantages, as in the use we make of those that we have. If you have a heart for God, and for His service, a way will be found for you ; and if you have no heart, neither pious parent nor diligent teacher can supply the lack. Be serious, be earnest, stoop to the Saviour's yoke, and yield to the guidance of the Spirit ; and you too shall be "made wise unto salvation." You shall fight a good fight in the great warfare with evil. You shall overcome at last ; the heavy armour shall be loosened, and the crown brought forth with shoutings ; and the King Himself shall acknowledge you before the holy angels as "a good soldier of Jesus Christ."



V.

LUKE.

Scripture references : Colossians iv. 14. ; Philemon 24 ;
2 Tim. iv. 11 ; and (as explained below) Acts xvi.
10-17 ; xx. 5-15 ; xxi. 1-17 ; xxvii. ; xxviii. 1-10.

WE have seen that during the years of his activity Paul was rarely without a band or body-guard of loyal companions attached to his person and associated in his work. Those must have been golden days in the progress of Christian enterprise, when Silas was with him, and Titus, and Timotheus, and a loving group besides ; days like those of the ancient chivalry,

“ When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.”

Even in his earlier imprisonment the Apostle had with him a faithful few whose names are united with his own in the salutations of his Epistles. But at last the group is scattered. Some have proved untrue, others have been sent on distant errands, and in his most urgent need Paul is left with one solitary comrade in the Roman prison. "Only Luke is with me," he writes to Timothy; and there is a touch of pathos, if not of sadness, in the words. But who is this steadfast follower, cleaving to his master like the bold Sir Bedivere, in the legend, to his dying king; and why should he, above all others, be honoured to remain beside him in his last adversity?

Our sources of information appear, at first sight, extremely slender. Besides the reference already given, the name occurs in two, and in two only, of the Epistles; those, namely, to the Colossians and Philemon, both written during Paul's first imprisonment at Rome. "There salute thee Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers." "Luke, the beloved phy-

sician, and Demas, greet you." In the Acts, there is no mention of such a man by name. And if one of the four Gospels is entitled "according to Luke," still the writer is not so designated in the body of the narrative, and there might appear to be nothing more than a coincidence in the names.

Now there is more than a coincidence; for the two men are really one and the same. Christian writers of a very early age assure us of the fact that the Evangelist Luke was the well-known physician and companion of Paul; and some of them add that he wrote his history under Paul's direction. But if he was the writer of the third Gospel, he was also the writer of the Acts of the Apostles; since the one book refers so pointedly to the other as a "former treatise" from the same hand. This, too, those primitive authorities confirm. And now there comes further light upon the man's identity in a rather curious manner. Up to a particular point in the Book of the Acts, the narrator uses the

third person in his descriptions, after the ordinary method of historians. Suddenly the third person is changed to the first: "*we* endeavoured to go into Macedonia;" "*we* came with a straight course to Samothracia." But the form of speech is dropped after a few verses in favour of the former one; and again, after an interval of three chapters, it is resumed, and is continued to the end of the book. The inference is a tolerably secure one that the writer of the history was to this extent an eye-witness of its events: that Luke must have so far accompanied Paul in his travels, shared his labours, and enjoyed his confidence. We can trace him in fact to Rome; and at Rome we are met by the allusions in the Epistles. Such are our materials; we have now to see what use we can make of them.

Of personal incident there is evidently very little. Whether Luke was Jew or Gentile, or to what country he belonged, cannot be decided, though tradition has fixed his birth-place at the Syrian Antioch, and criticism has judged that

he was a native of Philippi. Under whose ministry he became a Christian is equally uncertain; for his own statement merely shows that he was not among the immediate disciples of our Lord. Nor can we fix distinctly the scene and scope of his missionary labour. When he joins the company of Paul, they are preparing to cross from Asia into Europe; and, if the guidance of the pronouns may be trusted, he must have been left behind on their departure from Philippi. When he re-appears it is again in the neighbourhood of Philippi, after a lapse of five or six years; Paul being then bound for Jerusalem on the final journey which led to his captivity. Conjecture has been busy as to Luke's occupation during that interval; and it has been rather confidently assumed that he remained in charge of the Philippian Church, and laboured in that part of Macedonia. That is possible; but the certainty we must be content to leave in that silence which, with singular modesty, Luke has observed about himself.

Whatever he did we know was done worthily and wisely, or he would not have been marked out by his leader with the honourable title, "my fellow-labourer."

We reach clearer ground when we proceed to consider the personal care and companionship which he was called on to exercise toward Paul. Every reader must have observed the remarkable fulness and precision which distinguish the last seven or eight chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, even above those which precede. These marks correspond exactly with that sign of the writer's presence which has been already indicated; and we have reason therefore to believe that, from the hour when they left Macedonia together for Judæa, Paul and Luke were scarcely separated. Luke must have witnessed the farewell of the Ephesian elders on the seashore at Miletum, the tearful expostulations of the brethren at Tyre and Cæsarea, the arrival in Jerusalem, and the conference with the elders there. Luke must have known, if he was

not actually present, of the riot in the temple, the arrest, the imprisonment, the trial before the Jewish council, and the interviews with Felix and Agrippa. Luke is believed to have shared much of the two years' confinement at Cæsarea. Certainly he shared the perils of the stormy voyage to Italy, and seems to have kept a regular journal of its stirring incidents. He was there, when at last they approached the Eternal City itself, and saw the joyful meeting between Paul and the Roman brethren, who came out forty miles along the Appian Way to give him welcome. He entered Rome beside his master, remained with him during that first imprisonment, and, as we have seen, returned to cheer him in the second. Now was there not a cause why Luke, above all others, should be kept, in these later days, so close to the side of Paul ?

He was a beloved friend ; but so were many others whose presence was far less constant and regular than his. He was a physician as well as a friend, and therein lay his special recommen-

dation. For we know that even during his most active years Paul was a great and frequent sufferer. The thorn in the flesh, whatever was its nature, buffeted him so sorely that again and again he cried out for deliverance from it. How aggravated would it become with increasing years, with the exposure, the hardship, the continual confinement! The cold of the Roman winters tried him terribly. And while Titus is despatched in one direction, and Crescens in another, Luke stays with Paul because he can do him most good. Not, indeed, that human art could extract what divine wisdom had declined to remove, or that a longer term of life was greatly desired. But it is cheering to remember that what the healing science of those days could suggest was done to soothe and to alleviate; and it is noteworthy that the Apostle, while ready to be offered, and even anxious to depart, sought relief from the skilful and affectionate care of his "beloved physician."

The great monument to the memory of Luke,

however, is to be found in his immortal histories. Apart from their divine inspiration, they are priceless relics of Christian antiquity. They recount to us the two lives which we most desire to know : the life of our Lord, and the life of the early Church. Of the latter we should have had no adequate conception whatever but for the Acts of the Apostles. The former, already described by Matthew and Mark, is told in the third Gospel with many additional facts, and in a method which gives it a peculiar value. In both books we recognize the hand of a man of education, exact in his information and picturesque in his description, delighting to communicate details of place or time, and to make his history live before his reader's eye. But the special interest lies in the spirit which they breathe. The man shines through the writer and seems to grow familiar as a friend. There is not the abundance of Old Testament reference which distinguishes the pages of Matthew, nor the depth of spiritual discernment which is manifest in those of John :

but there is an element of feeling peculiar to Luke ; a mingled breadth and warmth, which remind us continually of the Christian teaching and temper of the last and greatest of the Apostles.

There are traditions which connect Paul with the actual composition of the Gospel of Luke. The intimate friendship in which the two men lived would doubtless lead the Apostle to relate to the Evangelist much of what he had received by separate revelation from the Lord, and to counsel him in his selection of materials. If the third Gospel was written during the imprisonment at Cæsarea, as is reported, the connection becomes the more probable. Too much stress, however, is not to be laid upon this point. Luke certainly gathered his information from a great variety of sources, and was in direct communication with the original Apostles. The link which attaches him to Paul is rather in the inward view which he takes of Christian truth, and the spirit in which he labours to present it. Let it suffice to instance two characteristics.

Salvation by grace is confessedly the leading theme of Paul's preaching and of Paul's Epistles. He was the Apostle of the Gentiles, commissioned to present the message of the kingdom in its freest form, clear of all limitations. Now if we had to choose out of the four Gospels the one most suited to the heathen, as distinguished from the Jews, and therefore most adapted for general circulation, should we hesitate to name the Gospel of Luke? Christ appears in its pages as emphatically the Saviour; the Saviour of the world, and especially the Saviour of the lost. The famous fifteenth chapter is really the key to the whole book. Seeking the lost is its burden from beginning to end. The outcasts of society become the objects of Christ's care and cure. The characters we meet are the beggar Lazarus, the poor widow with her two mites, the despised Samaritan, the publican pushed into the outskirts of the temple court, the prodigal son. To the Saviour's feet creeps the fallen woman of the city; the sinner

Zaccheus runs to see Him ; on the very cross the penitent robber craves His mercy. All own Him, and all are by Him accepted. Let the contrite and troubled heart turn hither ! For here we meet the fulness of redeeming mercy which, comprehending the vilest, cannot exclude us ; and here we see in exercise that simple principle of humble confidence which justifies the ungodly : “ Thy faith hath saved thee ; go in peace.” It is Paul’s great doctrine of justification by faith, illustrated in the action, and impressed in the words, of Christ.

No less prominent in Luke is that other leading element of Paul’s teaching which he calls “ joy in the Lord.” The third Gospel is, above all, the gospel of gladness. The angels’ song is echoed from one page to another : “ Behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy.” A happy Christian heart, one feels, has been concerned in the choice and composition of its materials. For the people “ rejoice at all the wonderful works ” of Christ ; and the

seventy "return with joy" from their missionary travels; and the sinner, whose house the Lord enters, "receives him joyfully;" and "there is great joy in the city" where the preachers of the Word have come. The curtain falls upon the company of disciples "returning with great joy," even from the parting with their ascended King, and "continually praising and blessing God." Nay, our evangelist is suffered to unveil to us the hallowed delights of the heavenly sanctuary; and from the rejoicings of angels over repenting sinners, we are taught that "it is meet for us to make merry and be glad." Oh Christian of the drooping, doubting spirit, breathe the air which this Gospel diffuses, and in its own words, "lift up your head, for your redemption draweth near."

Luke is still "with us" in these imperishable works which the Spirit moved him to accomplish. But as Paul hastens to speak of a greater Friend, who never left him in his worst extremities, we too pass from the servant's repre-

sentations to the Master's life and person. Whatever becomes of earthly helpers, adds the Apostle, "the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work." Through these inspired pages we also reach the presence of the incarnate Redeemer ; and as at Jericho, at Bethany, at Emmaus, He "comes in to us, and sups with us, and we with Him."





VI.

AQUILA AND PRISCILLA.

Scripture references : Acts xviii. 1-18, 24-29 ; 1 Cor. xvi. 19 ; Rom. xvi. 3-5 ; 2 Tim. iv. 19.



THE story of this Christian pair presents to us one of those glimpses into the social habits of the age, which are so precious, because they are so rare. The air which we breathe becomes that of the workshop and the family. We feel the stir of the commercial activities of the time. We find "Aquila and his wife Priscilla" travelling from city to city, like the Midianite merchants of old, or the architects and masons of the Middle Ages, and carrying their trade wherever it was

likely to be most in request. Now they are at Rome, then at Corinth, and presently at Ephesus, places separated as widely then in point of time as London, Bombay, and Hong-Kong at the present day. The very form of their names suggests that it may have been assumed for safety or convenience in travel; for the names are Latin, and they themselves were Jews, born in Pontus, where Jewish settlements abounded.

Various explanations have been given of the Greek word which describes their business. "By their occupation they were tentmakers." "They were of ropemaker craft," is Wycliffe's translation. Others have suggested "saddlers," "tapestry-weavers," and even "mathematical instrument makers." There is no reason, however, to go so far a-field. Tents were in great demand in a warlike, wandering age like that. At Rome they would be wanted for the army, and at Ephesus for sale to the shepherds of the interior. They were made of a rough black cloth, woven from the coarse hair of the goats which

browsed over the broad highlands of Asia Minor. Aquila and his wife were either weavers of this cloth, or else they bought the cloth from others and made their money by the manufacture of it into tents.

There is reason to suppose that they were in comfortable circumstances. At Rome and at Corinth they had houses large enough to accommodate a small assembly of brethren ; at Ephesus they were ready to receive strangers, and to afford them substantial shelter. Altogether, when we meet them, they appear an industrious, intelligent, and thriving Christian couple, singularly free from the bigotry common to their countrymen ; and we are now prepared, by the help of the Acts and the Epistles, to trace out the series of incidents which connect their personal history with the early annals of the Church.

The history opens in the synagogue at Corinth, at the time of Paul's first visit to that great commercial capital. He is at the time in deep

depression, and having parted from Silas and Timothy at Berea, he finds himself without a single companion. He looks among the strange faces in the synagogue for some one to give him what he wants—work to do and a friendly roof over his head. Aquila and his wife come forward to greet the stranger. Their trade proves to be also his; their house and workshop are at his service, and he goes home with them at once. It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Month after month Paul “reasoned in the synagogue,” and preached in the house of Justus, till all the city was moved and the great Corinthian Church was gathered. But each night we imagine him finding his way back to that homely shelter, and receiving counsel and comfort from those wise and faithful friends; and many a long day’s trying work over the tough haircloth was softened by the same companionship.

Was Paul the means of their conversion? Curiously enough, nothing is said about that. One is disposed to conclude that in their travels

they had already met with Christian teachers and embraced the faith. Then this intimacy with the Apostle would serve to clear their views and confirm their resolutions, and they would be prepared to explain to others also "the word of God more perfectly." For eighteen months the three lived and laboured and prayed together ; and then, sailing in one ship to Ephesus, they parted company for a time, Aquila and his wife establishing themselves in that city and Paul hastening onward to the feast at Jerusalem.

Shortly after the separation, no small stir arose among the Jews at Ephesus from the appearance of a certain stranger in their synagogue. One of the great corn-ships which traded between Alexandria and Asia Minor had brought over a young university man, Apollos, trained in all the learning of the Jews. He appeared as the eloquent advocate of the Messiahship of Jesus. All were impressed ; but with a peculiar interest must Aquila and Priscilla have listened to this new and unex-

pected champion of the Christian faith. They soon detected, however, startling differences between the teaching of Apollos and that of Paul. It proved in many respects defective. It stopped half-way. There was only a partial knowledge of the facts, and there was a corresponding weakness in the doctrines. The coming of the Holy Spirit was evidently unknown to Apollos, and perhaps even the resurrection of Christ. He was just where they themselves may have been before Paul came, "knowing only the baptism of John."

It was delicate work for that plain couple to attempt to enlighten an educated man. If we want to see how such work may be delicately done, here is an example. They first took Apollos home with them, and showed him kindness. Then they told him all that they had learned from Paul, till the Gospel shone out in its full light and glory. From such teachers no one would be too proud to learn. "Love me, and then say what thou wilt." And who can measure

the good which they did by that frank and friendly conduct! Many a heretic has been made a heretic by the unbrotherly action of the orthodox. Apollos, roughly treated, might have become the leader of a heresy or the founder of a schism. To this husband and wife, under God, it may have been due that the fervent Alexandrian became not the rival, but the loyal ally and confederate of Paul.

For our next piece of information we turn to the first of Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians. Apollos has sailed for Corinth, and Paul has arrived from the East. He writes this letter at Ephesus, and, it may well be, in the very house of Aquila. Its allusions agree exactly with the narrative in the nineteenth chapter of the Acts. The Apostle is now in the very midst of the great Christian campaign of two whole years, during which all that district of Asia heard the Gospel preached. It is pleasant to be able to identify Aquila and Priscilla with that stormy period of the Apostle's history. They appear in

the Epistle as his steadfast coadjutors and as his devoted personal friends.

They have a "church in their house," and the phrase unfolds to us more of the church-life of early days. Public preaching went on daily in the market, the synagogue, or "the school of Tyrannus." But these public places were unsuitable for private instruction, for prayer-meetings, or for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and the community had, so far, no regular meeting-house of its own. The private houses of the more wealthy brethren were therefore thrown open for such fellowship. There seem to have been several such centres at Ephesus, each with its own band of members, wont to gather there, and who became "the church in *that* house." Paul went "from house to house," exhorting and comforting. Nor is it unlikely that of all such gatherings the earliest to be organized, as a kind of mother and model to the rest, would be the one that met in the house of those now experienced Christians, Aquila and his wife. That

“church” naturally sends a special salutation by the hand of Paul. Is it not still well if the pastor or evangelist can meet his scattered converts not only in the chapel or the lecture-room, but among the social and hallowing influences of such hospitable Christian homes?

To this same time at Ephesus belongs a reference in the passage next to be cited,—“who for my life laid down their own necks.” When and where did these faithful friends do that? Where so likely as in that city where, according to this same Epistle, there were “many adversaries,” and “wild beasts,” actual or figurative, with which “to fight”? When so likely as in the riot raised by Demetrius and the silversmiths, in which Paul so nearly lost his life? Perhaps, like Jason at Thessalonica, Aquila and Priscilla became bail for his peaceable departure. Perhaps an assault was made upon the house where Paul was known to lodge, and the courageous pair faced the mob and covered his escape at the risk of being pillaged and massacred themselves.

In some way they had risked their lives for him. The highest qualities, we see, may lie hidden in the homeliest natures.

A year has elapsed, and now the three friends are again wide apart. The Apostle has been travelling among the Macedonian churches, and is once more at Corinth. Aquila and Priscilla have found their way to Rome. Paul, writing salutations to the Roman Christians, sends his first greeting to them, and to "the church" which there also they have gathered "in their house."

It is the warmest outburst of affection in all his Epistles, and shows the ardour of his attachment and the depth of his obligation. He calls them his helpers, or fellow-workers; they had sat side by side over the tent-cloth; they had laboured side by side in the cause of Christ. He greets them as his brave defenders, to whom he owes the rescue of his life. He gives them thanks publicly by name, as a captain honours the courage of soldiers in the presence of all

their comrades. Nor is his commendation needed to secure for them now the confidence and affection of the churches. The story of their courage, their fidelity, their usefulness, had travelled far and wide. They were spoken of in distant cities, among disciples whom they had never seen, and never would see in the flesh. They were held up as bright examples, and honoured like personal friends by "all the churches of the Gentiles." So surely should our children learn to know the very names of modern missionaries, and confessors, and devoted Christian labourers, and to honour them above captains and kings.

Eight or ten more years are gone, and what years have they been for Paul! He has been seized at Jerusalem, imprisoned at Cæsarea, shipwrecked at Malta, confined at Rome for two long years at least, set free awhile, and is now again in bonds, and waiting for his death. Had he met Aquila and Priscilla in the interval? Were they among the group that stood waiting for him at Appii Forum, or had they been

present to minister to his wants in prison? There is no such intimation. Where, then, can they be?

Many of the old friends are now with the Lord: are they with Him? Many have loved the world, and gone back to its vanities; is it so with them? Still more have been deluded by the false teachers, and have no love left for Paul; and have they too turned against him? Impossible! We open once more the second Epistle to Timothy, and our inquiries are answered. Here occur the familiar names again, like well-known stars starting up above the horizon. They are at Ephesus, with Timothy, still living, still loyal and true. "Give an old man's greeting to Prisca and Aquila!"

There they disappear. Probably they survived Paul, growing older and older, let us hope, side by side, and in their deaths not long divided. They saw him face to face no more. But we imagine them visiting together the scene of the Apostle's execution and his humble grave; and

we see them living to tell a succeeding generation of that feeble bodily presence and the mighty soul within it, of that stammering speech which nevertheless penetrated men's minds by its directness and melted their hearts by its fire.

The charm of such a study as the present is its perfect homeliness. For one successor to Paul, there may be thousands to Priscilla and Aquila. We may emulate and equal them. A simple personal attachment to Christ; a marriage "in the Lord" like theirs; a steady industry, winning a happy independence; upright dealings, ready kindness, hearty hospitality; earnest inquiry after truth, calm adherence to principle, a courage ready, when called on, to become heroic—here are characteristics which may distinguish us all. Are they not those which the world craves to see in the followers of Christ, and which will best commend His Gospel to the hearts of men? Better work we cannot do for Him than to adorn by similar conduct the

doctrine we profess. And brighter crown was never woven by the angels than that which waits for those who, like that faithful pair, “do justly and love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.”





VII.

EPAPHRODITUS OF PHILIPPI.

Scripture References : Philippians ii. 25-30 ; iv. 10-18.

NO page in Apostolic history is written with a more graphic pen, or glows with a deeper spiritual interest, than that which records the origin of the Philippian church. In that city Europe first listened to the Gospel. There Paul first came into personal collision with the Roman authorities, and tasted the sharpness of the scourge, the stocks, and the dungeon. There he won for Christ such trophies as the jailer, the soothsaying slave-girl, and the devout household of the merchant Lydia. We turn, therefore, with eager expectation to the

Epistle which, ten years later, he sends from Rome "to the saints at Philippi." We examine with peculiar pleasure his photograph of one who was at that time an actual member of their community, and their chosen representative. For such was "Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered in your behalf to my wants."

The references given at the head of the present pages are our only source of information in regard to him. Some expositors, indeed, have sought to identify him with Epaphras, a man like-minded, to whose fervent spirit the Apostle bears willing witness in his Epistle to the Colossians. But Epaphras is expressly stated to be himself a Colossian, and his special anxieties were for the churches of Asia. Epaphroditus, it seems scarcely less clear, was a Philippian, and his connection lay with the churches of Macedonia. It follows that our scope is narrower than in former instances; but within its limit

we may discern the outline of a touching incident, and the traces of a character at once genial, modest, and devoted.

The Philippian brethren had always been distinguished by their generosity. Their contribution to the great collection made among the Gentile churches for the relief of "the poor saints in Jerusalem" had been far out of proportion to their poverty, and even beyond their proper power. To Paul's personal necessities, Philippi alone of all the Christian communities had counted it a matter of conscience to minister. That sense of obligation, slumbering for a time through want of opportunity, had now revived. They had heard of his imprisonment. They were distressed to think of the privations which he might have to encounter. They must do what they could to alleviate them. A bountiful gift, from the hands of cheerful givers, was the prompt and appropriate result of their consultations.

With the modern conveniences of the Bank and

the Post Office at our disposal, we can hardly appreciate the practical difficulty which in those days attended even the conveyance of a letter from one city to another. The embarrassment was still more serious in the case of money. The only method of remitting it was by the hands of some trusty messenger, willing to undertake the journey. In the present instance, the journey was not an easy one. It would involve either a long sea-voyage, over the very waters in which Paul himself had so nearly perished, or a yet more laborious transit by land through Macedonia and Illyricum to the point of passage across the Adriatic. It would occupy weeks, or even months, to reach Rome ; and by the time the messenger had fully discharged his duty, and returned to Philippi, a whole year might probably elapse. The call is made, however, for a volunteer. Epaphroditus answers the call. He does not appear to have business of his own in the capital, as Phœbe had, and Onesiphorus ; but he goes simply in the service

of the church, to the aid of their beloved Apostle, and therefore in the name of Christ.

The journey, we may suppose, is completed ; and, arrived in Rome, Epaphroditus hastens to commit the trust with which he came confided into the hands of Paul. We can conceive the joyful meeting, the eagerness of the first hurried inquiries, and the long and animated conversations which succeeded. We are shown the grateful, dignified temper in which the Apostle accepts the gift, as a token of his brethren's fidelity to their one Master, "a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God." The whole Epistle seems radiant with the glow of satisfaction with which he hears of their concord, their energy, and their valiant adherence to the truth. It tells how warmly he appreciated the thoughtful kindness which had prompted them to depute one of their own number for the very purpose of rendering personal service to their imprisoned friend.

Epaphroditus soon proved himself to be a worthy representative of the church from which

he came. He was much more than a bearer of their gifts. He laid himself out to be of use to Paul. He ministered, with a ready will, to his every want. He went swiftly on his every message. He threw his energies into the work of Christ in the city, and laboured with self-sacrificing zeal. The portrait which we have of him presents him as one of those invaluable helpers, alike tender and true, "brother and fellow-soldier," to whom you can confide your most secret anxieties, and whom you can trust to stand by you in your sorest perils. A confidence of no ordinary kind sprang quickly up between him and the aged Apostle whom he sought to serve. Perhaps he was fast becoming indispensable to Paul, as such friends are apt to become to ourselves.

Epaphroditus must have been for some length of time at Rome, when a grievous interruption happened to his mission there. He fell ill, apparently as the result of his unceasing exertions; he caught fever, perhaps, among some of

the slums of the great city: and the illness threatened to be fatal. The blow fell most heavily on Paul. It was a sore disappointment to be deprived of such a cheerful comrade in confinement, and such a willing-hearted companion in labour. But it seemed especially sad to see him ill in a foreign land, so far from home and friends; and to think that his suffering had come in the course of disinterested service rendered to the Apostle himself. What if the threatening death should actually descend? It would be "sorrow upon sorrow" to that noble, sympathetic heart. With what feelings should he send word to Philippi that their chosen messenger had fallen a victim to his fidelity, and that they would see his face no more?

He has, happily, another account to send now. The cloud has passed; the fervent prayers offered for that precious life have been heard, and "God had mercy" both on Epaphroditus and on Paul. The sick man has re-

covered ; but we judge the recovery to have been slow, for there had been time for tidings to reach the Philippians, and even for letters to have arrived from them in reply. Now it was his turn to be distressed. He had borne his own danger bravely ; but the thought of his anxious friends, perhaps of his trembling wife and children, completely overcame him. He lay longing again to be in their midst, and as soon as health was sufficiently restored, he became bent on an immediate return. Nor will Paul oppose his desire ; sad as it must have been to him to lose one after another of his faithful " fellow-prisoners," he never sought to retain them, when duty called them away. Let Epaphroditus go ! There will be joy at Philippi as they receive him safely back, rescued from the gates of the grave. Let that joy be unrestrained ; for never did messenger deserve a warmer welcome or a higher regard. And the sound of their gladness shall be heard in the lonely Roman prison, where Paul must

still wait his Master's time, and shall waken echoes of satisfaction in his burdened heart ; "Ye will rejoice, and I shall be the less sorrowful." So our story ends with the departure of Epaphroditus, carrying the Epistle to the Philippians in his hands, and the grateful benediction of the Apostle in his heart. "Receive him in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such in reputation." One would fain discover the peculiar qualities which drew from inspired lips such fervent commendations.

The loveable character of the man appears upon the surface. He carried with him everywhere that friendly spirit which opens other hearts as if by magic, and binds them to itself. Paul had been won in an instant by the frank offer of personal service ; and as the service was ungrudgingly maintained, the attachment grew stronger and surer. The very rumour of the illness of Epaphroditus occasioned a burst of agitated feeling among his friends ; the news of his recovery created a corresponding

delight. It is evident that any man must be worth loving, if people, separated from him by hundreds of miles, still bear him in affectionate remembrance, and long for his return. And such characters, in whatever class they appear, are one main element in the strength of the Christian Church. They are the firm cement without which its whole structure must crumble to the ground. They supply the warm and genial sunshine for its growth. Drinking daily themselves at the fountains of eternal love, they diffuse streams of kindness, which might water a wilderness. Do some, of stronger prejudice and keener temper, affect to despise their influence? Do others predict for them the danger of that woe which is to come upon those "of whom all men speak well"? They remember that the woe is directed expressly against the cowardice of compromise, and in no sense against the gracious exercise of goodness. Basing their friendliness on principle, seeking to inspire it with self-denial,

they have no fear of the disapproval of their Lord. They count on his sympathy ; they claim his sanction ; for “ now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three ; but the greatest of these is charity.”

It resulted from such a temper, that Epaphroditus was what we may call a serviceable man. There are a number of excellent people in the present day who insist on doing good in their own way, aside from the channels of our ordinary benevolence. To a certain extent, this is a symptom not to be regretted. It is extremely desirable that the Church should constantly find new openings for her energies ; and her devout thanks are due to those more original and enterprising spirits who explore the untrodden fields, and invent the appropriate appliances of action. Were all her members, however, to aspire to be discoverers, it would go hardly with the cultivation of the soil already in possession. No less, therefore, is the good cause indebted to those who

humbly accept the work which lies ready to their hands, and heartily discharge it. These are the special comfort of the Christian minister. These are the mainstay of our Sunday schools, our Missionary Societies, our ordinary agencies among the poor, the ignorant, and the afflicted. And they may fairly claim Epaphroditus as one of their own order. Never was a Christian man more thoroughly at the disposal of his brethren. Do they need a messenger to go to Rome, a minister to wait on Paul, a representative who will carefully convey to him their greetings and their gifts? He is ready to go. Does Paul desire a friend to stay at his side, a scribe to write his letters, a visitor to some sick house in Rome, a teacher of some little company of hearers there, a brave witness for the truth in the presence of its adversaries? Again he is ready; "my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier," doing all that he does "heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men."

We should be much mistaken if we inferred that there is little of the heroic in such a character. The contrary has indeed, on a previous page, become apparent. There breathes unnoticed in many humble hearts a devotion to the service of Christ, ready, if need arose, to endure the prison, or to abide the flame. There is displayed on many a bed of suffering, meekly borne, enough of uncomplaining fortitude to win a martyr's crown. So it is written of Epaphroditus ; "for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life." He did not seek death ; but when, in his steady course of obedience, death faced him, he did not flee from it. He would not throw away his life ; but if the choice came between losing life and shrinking from service, he was ready to let it go. Fana-ticism he would have abjured : fidelity and self-sacrifice he held to be simple duty. Are there not thousands in the ranks of our own Israel, leading humble, holy, and self-denying lives, who would be equally willing to die for Christ ?

Heroism lives in unsuspected places. The quaint saying of Dr. John Duncan about the early Christian teachers may prove to hold true of a multitude besides ; “ though they were poor theologians, they were shining lights, and they were *famous men to burn.*”

Devotion to duty is indeed the great general moral of these primitive biographies. It is to be learned, now as then, beside the Cross of Christ, where He showed Himself, for our sakes, “ obedient unto death.” From His example we gather our instruction. In His love we find our inspiration. “ Hereby perceive we the love of Christ, because He laid down His life for us ; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”






VIII.

THE HOUSEHOLD OF STEPHANAS.

Scripture References : Acts xviii. 1-11 ; 1 Corinthians
i. 14-16 ; xvi. 15-18.

HE original readers of the Apostolic letters must have been struck, even more than we can be, by the personal references, and the kindly private commendations, which light up their graver and more general contents. Let us imagine, for instance, one of the elders of the Corinthian Church reading out for the first time in some assembly of its members the first of the two Epistles which bear their name. It is full of the most weighty and elevating instructions. The

attention of the hearers has been strained to the utmost, as the letter has passed, from vindicating the divine simplicity of the Gospel, to give orders in regard to the discipline of unworthy members, the proper celebration of the Lord's Supper, the rules of social intercourse with the heathen, and the use of spiritual gifts ; and as it has risen to a climax in the glowing demonstration of the reality of the resurrection, and of the eternal life beyond. With what a sense of delighted relief they must have listened to the homely words with which the Epistle concludes, as to the collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem, and Paul's projected travels, and the probable visits of this missionary or of that, and the good work of their own brethren ! What a touch of natural interest as the reader went on, " Ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first-fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints ; I beseech you that ye submit yourselves unto such ! " The house of Stephanas ? There, prob-

ably, they sat among their brethren, and every child knew them familiarly. The words must have seemed like an autograph signature to the Epistle, making it life-like and personal; and now they set us of the later time inquiring who these people were, and what is to be learned from them.

“The house of Stephanas” may mean one of two things. Either there was a heathen master of that name, and the persons referred to were his Christian slaves; or else Stephanas was himself a Christian, and his children, and perhaps his servants also, were one with him in faith. We choose the latter alternative as the more likely one, for the obvious reason that we read, in the very next verse of the Epistle, of Stephanas himself as actively engaged in the service of the church.

The members of this family, then, were the earliest Corinthian converts, or “the first-fruits of Achaia,” the province of which Corinth was, the capital. It was now four or five years since

Paul had arrived in that bustling heathen city, a solitary stranger, "in weakness and fear, and much trembling." He came thither seeking the fruit of redeemed souls, consecrated to God. During eighteen months of untiring labour he had been permitted to reap a rich spiritual harvest; and he now addressed a numerous and flourishing church. But no subsequent successes could make him forget the toils of the early days at Corinth, and the joy of the first-fruits. There was fierce opposition to contend with; and the Apostle was obliged to withdraw from the synagogue, and to take a preaching-room of his own in a house hard by. With what anxiety he was filled lest all should be in vain! And when men began to listen eagerly; when he caught the look of interest on the face of Stephanas, and of the group which surrounded him; and when, going to their house, he heard their inquiries, and was enabled to guide them to Christ, must it not have been like an earnest of the harvest-home? The ancient Israelite was to bring every

year an armful of the new corn from his field to the priest, and the priest was to wave it before the Lord, in token of grateful obligation. And here Paul seems to stand with that saved family, the sheaf of his first-fruits, in his Master's presence, rejoicing, forasmuch as he now knew that his labour was not in vain in the Lord.

This allusion serves to explain another. At the outset of his first Epistle, Paul refers to the ordinance of baptism, and his own practice in regard to it. His practice was never to baptize with his own hands, lest he might be suspected of baptizing in his own name, and so of creating a sect or a schism. "I thank God," he writes, "I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius;" and then, as if recollecting himself, he adds, "and I baptized also the household of Stephanas." The reason for these exceptions to his ordinary rule is at hand. They were the first-fruits of Achaia, and there was no one else to baptize them. After their reception, Stephanas himself, or Crispus, would undertake the office

of baptizing, and Paul would be left free "to preach the gospel." The administration of ordinances is therefore no prerogative of pastors or teachers, though it may be convenient usually to entrust it to them. As a principle, any Christian may baptize ; and it is surely matter for surprise that, where the pastorate is vacant, the honoured deacons and elders of our churches should hesitate themselves to undertake the office.

One would fain picture to oneself that first baptism at Corinth. Probably it was a very quiet service, either by the seaside, under the broad sky, or in one of the spacious public baths which abounded in all great cities, or in a private house. There were the family ; with them a few sympathizing friends, such as Aquila and Priscilla ; and in the midst the Apostle, knitting his enfeebled frame to the unaccustomed work. First the father steps forward, throws off his outer robe, and with the solemn words, "I baptize thee in the name of the Lord Jesus," is plunged beneath the water ; and then his house-

hold, from the greatest to the least. Were there children among them? It is quite possible. No elaborate form of faith was then exacted from believers in order to baptism. All that Paul would require was what our own missionaries asked from Krishnu, the first Hindoo whom they baptized, "a profession of dependence on Christ, and submission to Him in all things." It is all that ought ever to be required; and, on those terms, intelligent children of tender age may be welcomed to baptism as freely as the more advanced. The one condition is that they be believers; and that condition we know was fulfilled by the family of Stephanas, by the household of the Philippian gaoler, and in every Scripture instance the clear particulars of which we possess. "Adult baptism" therefore is a phrase which we may well abandon; "believers' baptism" is a truth which we hold to be firmly established, and for which we must earnestly contend.

Four years have elapsed since the conversion

of Stephanas and his family ; and we wonder how they have prospered, and what their standing in the church may be. Corinth is a wicked city, full of temptations ; and the Corinthian Christians are of a very mingled character for good and evil. But what we now hear of that household is highly to their honour. “They have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.” “Addicted” here means “appointed” or “devoted ;” they have set themselves, unasked and unrewarded, with a free and generous consecration, to the service of the church. For “the ministry of the saints” does not imply any express ecclesiastical office, but a general exercise of benevolence, as opportunity should arise. Their house stood open to all who needed hospitality. The sons acted as almoners to the poor, or exerted themselves to find employment for the needy ; the daughters nursed the sick, and clothed the naked ; the father took a leading part in the church’s business, and was entrusted with its weightiest commissions. At

this very time Stephanas had been on a visit of Christian kindness to Paul at Ephesus, and with him two others, Fortunatus and Achaicus, possibly his sons, more probably, if they belonged to him at all, his servants. They had gone with supplies for his bodily wants, and with cheerful and refreshing sympathies. Acknowledge the value of such a family, says the Apostle, writing to the church. All honourable, and all useful; free from the party spirit and the laxity of moral judgment which infected some of their brethren; a sample of other households, like-minded, at Corinth and elsewhere—submit yourselves, he urges, willingly to such leaders, and count them worthy of all honour. “Ye know the house of Stephanas.” I too know them, and esteem them as my helpers and fellow-labourers!

Is there not something delightfully natural (to use that word in its better sense) in this union of an entire family in Christ and in His Church? It is true that, under the Gospel, religion is a distinctly personal matter, and that a descent

from Abraham himself is no guarantee of salvation ; it is true that, in some sad instances, “ the father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father.” But that prophecy does not lay down a law. There is no stern necessity in the divine counsels for such lamentable disunion and division. The New Testament is full of happy illustrations to the contrary,¹ like our present one. Why should we make up our minds to a division in any family ? Some exceptions, have you said to yourself, there must be among my children ; some will be taken, and others will be left, according to the mysterious working of the Spirit’s call. Why must there be ? Why should we not rather regard it as a startling thing, if but one seem to be left out ? Thousands of united households still sit down side by side at the Lord’s Table in our English churches. Let us not only offer the earnest

¹ See, for instance, John xi. 5 ; Acts x. 24, 44, 48 ; xvi. 15, 31-34 ; xviii. 8 ; xxi. 9 ; Ephes. vi. 1 ; Philemon 1-2 ; 2 John 1-4.

prayer, but let us cherish the good hope, that it may be so with our own. And if these pages fall under the eye of some wife or husband, some son or daughter, who still stands aloof, let them say, whether they will mar the beauty of a complete Christian household, as theirs also might be? Will you be the Absalom of your family? Will you not rather be its Ruth, and say with her, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God?"

Let there be no misunderstanding, however, on this point. The religious tie which bound the household of Stephanas together was not an ecclesiastical form, but a spiritual reality. They were not united in the church because they had a pious father, or because sponsors had stood sureties for them in their infancy. Faith in their case had gone before baptism, and faith had been proved by works. We must first invite the younger members of our households, not to the baptistery or the communion table, but to a living devotion to Christ. That, and only that,

is real religion ; to fight your own way into the kingdom, and to plant your own foot on the glorious foundation-stone of our everlasting hopes.

And then, what an enduring bond we have ! The house of Stephanas is long ago broken up. The children followed their father to the grave, and were presently borne thither themselves. Even the re-united group at Bethany must have been sundered at last. Here we part ; the sons emigrate, the daughters are married ; new relationships are formed, and new homes follow ; then, like the cables of a ship, snapping one after another, the old ties are broken by death ; and even the wedded vow is at last exhausted. Does the spiritual bond survive those changes and that catastrophe ? Will it still hold—the anchor which we have cast within the very veil ? Surely it will. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ?” asks the Apostle. Ay, and if we be all His, who shall separate us from each other’s love ? My lost ones are gone to be with Him,

and I too go to be with Him in my turn ; we cannot then be far apart. We cannot but be re-united ; if some get home a little earlier in the day, and some a little later, before nightfall we shall all be gathered in our Father's house.

“ As for my friends, they are not lost ;
The several vessels of Thy fleet,
Though parted now, by tempests tossed,
Shall safely in the haven meet.”

And as parent draws to child, and wife to husband, and brother to sister, in that world of higher life and service, and the broken families of earth are brought again together, the blessing of heaven descends upon the unfading union, and *they* “know the house of Stephanas, that they are the first-fruits of Achaia, and that,” according to their several ability, “they addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.”



IX.

PHŒBE OF CENCHREA.

Scripture reference : Romans xvi. 1, 2.

IT is not easy to conceive of the Epistle to the Romans, now such an integral part of our English Bible, in its original form as a separate roll of paper or parchment, freshly written in Greek letters by an ordinary scribe, and about to be conveyed from Corinth to Rome in the charge of an ordinary traveller. The very name, however, of the scribe is preserved to us ; “ I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle.” And as to the bearer, the note at the end of the letter is, in this

instance, probably correct ; “ sent by Phœbe, servant of the church at Cenchrea.” She was one well worthy to be entrusted with the spiritual treasure ; and the incidental notice of her character deserves our own attention. “ I commend unto you Phœbe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea ; that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you : for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.”

Cenchrea, then, was this lady’s home. Cenchrea was on the sea, a thriving town about eight miles from Corinth ; and it was the port from which the Corinthian commerce was carried on with Asia Minor and the East. Thence Paul had sailed for Jerusalem on a former occasion, “ having shorn his head in Cenchrea ;” and there, as in the neighbouring city, he had been the means of establishing a Christian church. Phœbe, intending to travel westward, would pass through Corinth on her road, and embark from the oppo-

site shore of the Isthmus, at the port of Lechæum, whence ships sailed for Italy.

There are indications that she was a person of considerable influence, and even wealth. She had "business" on which it was necessary to travel to the capital; and a journey so expensive and wearisome implies a corresponding importance in the traveller. Her practical aid was generously and widely bestowed, for she was "a succourer of many;" and the original word implies the ideas which we connect with patronage and protection. She had a broad wing under which to shelter the afflicted. Add to this that she was probably a widow, since only in that character could she have travelled so independently, that she would have, like Lydia, servants in attendance, and a large group of friends to bid her farewell, and we see all that can now be seen of the circumstances of her departure for Rome.

Her Christian character, however, is very distinctly brought out. The Apostle himself guaran-

tees the genuineness of her faith, when he calls her "our sister." The Roman brethren may receive her with perfect confidence as one with them "in the Lord." At Cenchrea she was not only a recognized member, but an active and useful "servant of the church." Indeed, a question of considerable interest arises as to whether she was not an office-bearer there. Many would translate, "a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea." A wider question is, therefore, involved; were there deaconesses in the primitive church, answering to the deacons, and set apart for a corresponding purpose?

The famous letter of Pliny to the Emperor Trajan, written early in the second century, speaks of two Christian women, "who were called ministers," having been examined by torture. This looks as if a female order of some kind existed in the churches of Asia Minor at that time. In the New Testament itself, besides the passage under notice, the only similar indications are in the Epistles to Timothy and

Titus ;¹ and these are too vague to sustain any very definite conclusion. The probable fact is that there was no actual order of deaconesses in Apostolic days ; but that wherever a Christian woman showed signs of unusual prudence, piety, and courage, and enjoyed sufficient leisure for the service, she was joyfully accepted as a fellow-labourer. She would do such work as elders and deacons failed to do so well, or could not do at all. She would answer to the Bible-woman, or the district-visitor, of the present day. Perhaps she would be entrusted with the alms of the church, and with the relief and refreshment of its poor and of its sick. Such a “servant” was Phœbe to the church at Cenchrea ; such to the church at Rome were Tryphena and Tryphosa, and “the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord ;” and such at Philippi, “those women which laboured with me in the Gospel.”

¹ 1 Tim. iii. 11 (where for “their wives” some would read “the women,” *i. e.* the women deacons) ; and Titus ii. 3.

Let the churches find room and exercise for all gifts! There is no need to invent any new name, or to establish any special office or order. "Servants of the church" are wanted everywhere. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," and so shalt thou become, like this lady of the early time, "a succourer of many."

A glorious sphere of interest and activity is opened by the Gospel to the women who embrace it. Those of them who are without domestic ties and responsibilities may find a place in the very van of the Christian army, and may achieve some of the noblest missionary work. In the most dangerous districts of Paris, in the Indian zenanas, among the women and children of China, English ladies labour at this hour with a devotedness and a success never exceeded by the stronger sex. Without leaving her home, or neglecting her children, the matron may have her class or her district, and there may do the work of an evangelist, and shed a heavenly influence round. The slander that a woman's mind

can only care for trifles and frivolities receives its best rebuke in the history of the kingdom of God. The cry for woman's rights finds its best satisfaction here; for here is need of all the grace, the tact, the self-sacrifice of woman, and here is her reward. Happy are those churches which enjoy the hearty service alike of their sons and of their daughters, and where the gentler gifts and graces of the one set themselves to the sterner qualities of the other,

“ Like perfect music unto noble words.”

Phœbe, then, is about to sail for Rome, and she is commended to the care and kindness of the brethren there. She will arrive a stranger in the mighty metropolis, in much need of prompt assistance and advice. Hospitality, in all its branches, was a sacred duty in those perilous days. Paul asks that the necessary attentions may be bestowed on this Christian sister; and it is of interest to notice in what terms he writes.

He puts his request in a very practical form. The errand on which she goes is a business one, connected either with commerce, or, as has been thought more likely, with law. It may have been a lawsuit pending in one of the Imperial courts. Now a foreigner, like Phœbe, would be at a terrible disadvantage there. She would be unacquainted with the forms of procedure. She might readily become a victim to the wiles of some acute but unprincipled practitioner. Bribery might be used against her, or intimidation might be tried. Paul feels deeply for his inexperienced friend cast into that vortex of Roman life. "Assist her," is his entreaty to the brethren there. Stand by her in her need. Make her cause your own. Counsel her as to the wisest procedure to adopt. Be at her side when the cause comes on. Throw over her the shield of your superior local knowledge and influence, and see that she is not wronged. It will be a brotherly duty, and it may lead to a prosperous result.

Would that our sentiments of Christian friendship were more readily reduced to this form of practical assistance! It is comparatively easy to give alms, and kind words, and prayers. What is often most wanted is a little trouble; a careful consideration of the case, and an endeavour to meet it in the most effectual way. Here, for instance, is a man in want of a situation; can we not procure one for him? There is a sick woman, suffering hopelessly because she has no proper medical attention; can we not provide it? Here some young man is beginning business, or entering on a profession; how much would a little sound advice be worth to him? Or, here again, is a widow left to fight her way through life with her young children, and her natural counsellor gone from her side; what would she give for the fatherly guidance of some Christian man, with experience of the world, who would act a kinsman's part to her in her perplexities? "I commend unto you" these, and such as these,

“that ye assist them in whatever business they have need of you.”

Consider also the mutual character which is to distinguish our Christian friendship. What had Phœbe ever done for the brethren at Rome? Nothing. Why then should they be summoned to her side? Because of what she had been to others, “a succourer of many, and of myself also.” She had stood by Paul in his need, and by many a sick-bed, and in many a poor home, in her own town of Cenchrea. The obligation passes on to all Christians. All are her debtors. She has helped others; now let her be helped in turn.

The cup of cold water is to go round from hand to hand. To-day you have to give it; to-morrow you may have to receive it. At your door waits some fainting brother, seeking counsel or comfort. Do not refuse him; your own turn will soon come. Or perhaps your turn has come, and it is you who thirst for sympathy and stand in need of help. Take freely what

your friends offer ; you will have ample opportunity to repay it. For there is a freemasonry in the kingdom of Christ which we should never fail to recognize ; and our Lord's words should find an echo in the hearts of all His servants, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto them, ye did it unto me."

And those words remind us how all our attentions to one another are to spring from our common allegiance to Him. "Receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints." There ought to be a certain characteristic warmth and unction in Christian kindness, distinguishing it from all other. How should we welcome our King, if he himself landed on our shores, and came to our house-doors, and sought our hospitality, or desired our aid? So are we to receive and succour one another. So let Phæbe be welcomed, with like fervour and alacrity. For the Lord appears in His servant, and the servant is to be looked at in his Lord ; and the kindness of the

Roman brethren to their sister from afar would not miss of its abundant recompense in the approval of a good conscience and the assurance of a Saviour's regard.





X.

ONESIPHORUS OF EPHESUS.

Scripture references : 2 Timothy i. 16-18 ; iv. 19.

WE were able, in some of the previous cases, to trace out, by comparison of Scripture passages, a tolerably complete and connected account of the persons named. A glimpse is all that we have gained in others ; and it is only a glimpse that we obtain of our present subject. The man who now steps upon the scene does not re-appear. One Epistle only mentions him, and in the Acts his very name is unrecorded. What we gather, we must gather from two passing allusions in

the second Epistle to Timothy. "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well." "Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus."

Let us mark, however, before we proceed, what letter it is which contains these references. It is the last of all the Epistles of Paul, written, as we have repeatedly observed, during his second imprisonment, and not long before his death. He is again at Rome, but not, as on the former occasion, in his own hired house, with liberty to receive whom he will, and to speak all that is in his heart. Cold, and worn, and ill, Paul the aged lies in his prison cell; and, of all his many companions, only Luke is with him now. So it happens that the very Epistle which

is full of the most heroic confidence in Divine protection is marked by the tenderest yearnings after human sympathy; and the heart of the Apostle is swayed like the sea before the rough wind of unkind desertion, and again under the soft breeze of faithful solicitude and care. There go the false friends—"all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes." And here comes the good Onesiphorus, warming Paul's heart by the mere recollection of his fidelity, and drawing Paul's blessing down on himself and on his house.

Onesiphorus, it is clear, was an Ephesian; for Timothy was at this time resident at Ephesus, and there this man's household dwelt. There, then, Paul and he had made acquaintance, during the long continued campaign of the Apostle in the city, now ten years ago. That earlier time is not forgotten. Every one knew, and Timothy had often heard of what value his friendship had been. His house was one

of the many which had opened to Paul and made him welcome. Children were there, now grown to manhood, who were taught to run to the door at his approach, and to draw him joyfully in. Servants were there, who would bring water for his feet, and food for his hunger, not by constraint, but willingly ; for was he not the champion and friend of their downtrodden class? And there was Onesiphorus himself, hastening from his business to receive the great preacher, "ministering to him" with his own hands, and serving him with all the interest and influence he had. Happy memories of those evening welcomes rose in Paul's mind as he wrote. How thankful had he often felt to turn away from the school of Tyrannus, with its hot discussions and its not unfrequent perils, and to seek the rest and retirement of the house of Onesiphorus ! It must have been to him what Bethany was to our Lord, a harbour of refuge from the stormy scenes of Jerusalem. It was more than that : "he oft refreshed me." Courage

came back, and wearied energies were revived, and clearer plans were conceived, and nobler ambitions were kindled, as those two, Paul and Onesiphorus, took counsel together, and waited in prayer and faith upon God.

Years passed, and they had not met. Business of some kind brings Onesiphorus at last to Rome. Paul is at Rome too, a prisoner, in close confinement, and it is not easy to get access to him. The Roman Christians are rather afraid of being associated with him; they think it safer on the whole to keep away, and not to know where he is; for, if they visit him, they too may come under the notice of the authorities, and share his fate. Christianity is under the emperor's ban, and the disciples hide themselves in corners of the city, and profess no connection with a culprit such as Paul. "No man stood by me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it be not laid to their charge."

This good Ephesian, however, is made of sterner stuff. He applies to the brethren, and to

his astonishment they have nothing to tell about the Apostle. He goes to the Government offices and inquires there ; there information is scornfully refused. He makes his way, nothing daunted, to the prisons, and gets referred from one jailer to another, till he is almost tired out, but he perseveres ; and at last here is a man who can tell him. But does he know the risk to his own liberty, perhaps to his own life ? He knows ; he is prepared to face it, if only he may see Paul. “ He sought me out very diligently, and found me,” found the solitary old man with the chains on his hands, and the damp dark prison-walls round him, and the hard black bread to eat, and the thin worn clothing that could not keep out the cold, and scarce a comrade left. What a meeting must that have been ! Sunshine pouring into the mouth of a cave is a poor emblem of what the sight of that brave and cheerful countenance must have been to Paul. His dear old friend ! The ministries of Ephesus renewed at Rome ! “ Onesiphorus ”—well named

—one who brings with him advantage, counsel, comfort, who comes to light up a new fire of love and hope on the cold hearthstone of that weary prisoner's life.

It was not then in vain that Jesus had left the word on record for His disciples, "I was in prison, and ye came unto me." Christian sympathy will find a way through every difficulty, and a key for every prison door. It goes after the sorrowful and the solitary. Be it ours also "to seek out" our brethren in distress, and not to rest till we too have "found" some Paul, to whose wants we may minister, and whose drooping spirit we may refresh. The utmost diligence, the keenest ingenuity, the bravest resolution, how can they be better spent than in the service of our Lord, and on behalf of the least of His suffering brethren?

Paul has no silver or gold to give; he is so poor that he cannot buy a cloak to keep off the cold; but he has something to be prized far more—a good man's prayers. Those prayers

he offers both for Onesiphorus himself and for his family. "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus." "The Lord grant it unto him."

Was Onesiphorus living at the time? Some contend that he was not, because the salutation goes to his household, and not to him; and they conclude that he must have died in the interval. The conclusion is scarcely justified. "The house of Stephanas," at Corinth, is mentioned, when we know that Stephanas himself was still alive; and if Onesiphorus was absent on his journey, he would naturally not be included in the salutation. The point is of interest, because Roman Catholic expositors have urged the present passage as establishing the practice of prayers for the dead. But even were their interpretation correct, a brotherly blessing such as this would be far from offering a parallel or a precedent for the unscriptural system of priestly intercession for souls in purgatory, which the Romish Church upholds.

The greater interest lies in the nature of the prayer itself. Paul sees "that day" approaching to his friend and to himself—the great day of account, when good and evil must stand before the bar of God. He does not think of it in the light and almost flippant spirit which some of our modern believers affect, as if judgment had nothing to do with them. He trusts that he is safe in Christ, and that his friend is also safe. Yet to pass the dread ordeal, and come forth uncondemned, forgiven, saved for ever, what a wonder of grace will be there! What should one pray for so earnestly as for that? "May Onesiphorus, stretching forth his hands in that day for mercy, find mercy, even as diligently seeking he found *me*! The Lord grant that he whom I so joyfully embraced in my poor prison may be clasped in the everlasting arms, and received into the heavenly home!"

Nor is it Onesiphorus alone for whom Paul would pray. Let his household too be saved.

Those sweet children, to whom he had so often spoken of the love of Jesus ; those faithful servants, who had their master's example to guide them ; the kinsfolk who came to visit him ; may they all be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord their God ! See how great the blessing is of belonging to a godly home. A child is not saved because he has a Christian father, nor a servant because he has a Christian master ; but how the influence of such a man, and his prayers, and the prayers of others on his behalf, flow out upon his family ! How much love and sympathy, how much wise counsel and kindly warning, how many friends of the best stamp, are mine, because the Father of all mercies cast my lot in a home where He was honoured, and whither good men were wont to come ! Take heed, ye children of the godly ; ye for whom many a prayer, fervent as Paul's own prayers, has been offered for your parents' sake ; to households like that of Onesiphorus much

has been given, and of them much will be required.

What choicer blessing can we have than the prayers of Christian people? That bed-ridden saint cannot give you payment for your visits, but when you are gone she will breathe blessings on you and on yours into ears that are never closed to her. Those native Christians far across the sea are poor, and may have to throw themselves still upon the English churches for support in time of need; but the obligation is not all on one side, while such brethren pray for our prosperity. The loved ones in heaven, whom we tenderly carried down to the river's brink, cannot repay us with words of encouragement, or guide us with their long and ripe experience. But have they ceased to pray? Surely they are now our good angels, beholding the face of God, and adding their intercessions to those of the great Advocate. They may be suffered to see something of our mortal sufferings and struggles. They

cannot be forbidden to think of us. And if they think of us, and still more if they see us, the incense of their adoration before the throne is mingled with urgent entreaties on our behalf, which will surely prevail. Think of us, ye departed saints, now that it is well with you, and make mention of us in the ears of your King!

Onesiphorus has been abundantly recompensed in time and in eternity for all that he had done and dared for Paul. Need we fear to be overlooked? We have the servants' prayers. We have the Master's promise. "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."






XI.

PHILEMON AND ONESIMUS.

Scripture references : Col. iii. 22-25 ; iv. 1, 9, 17 ; and the Epistle to Philemon.

HE Epistle to Philemon has an interest and a value peculiarly its own. It contains no stately scheme of doctrine, like the Epistle to the Romans ; no glowing description of privilege, like that to the Ephesians ; and at first sight we might wonder at its admission into the canon of Scripture. But it proves to be a precious fragment of early Church history. It affords us a glimpse into the existing state of society ; and it shows

us the manner in which the social problems of that day were dealt with by a Christian Apostle. And this is done by suggestions and intimations out of which we may construct the whole story of the master Philemon and his fugitive slave Onesimus.

The opening salutation of Paul's letter presents to us an earnest Christian man, "Philemon, our dearly beloved and fellow-labourer." The next words seem to introduce us to his wife, "our beloved Apphia," and their son, "Archippus, our fellow-soldier;" and to indicate that their home was one of the headquarters of the brethren, "the church that is in thy house." It becomes also clear that Philemon was noted for his hearty and hospitable character; for it had rejoiced Paul's inmost heart to hear of his "love to all the saints," and of the refreshment which they gained from his brotherly attentions. To Paul himself Philemon bore an ardent affection: "Thou wilt do more than I say," writes the Apostle, confident in his loyalty;

and well he might, for the man was one of his own sons in the faith, owing to him, under God, his own self, and therefore everything he had. Let it be further remembered that he was a householder of wealth, owning slaves, and able, if he chose, to set them free, and the outline of the character is tolerably complete.

Where then did he live? His own name is nowhere else given; but we have Archippus mentioned as one of the ministers of the Church at Colosse, and Onesimus appears as one of the bearers of the Epistle written to the brethren there: the greetings also in the two letters to the Colossians and to Philemon are from the same men. There seems to be ground for the conclusion that Philemon was a citizen of Colosse, and a member of the Christian community there. Now Colosse was one of the cities of Asia Minor, and it lay at no great distance from Ephesus. Paul implies that he had never himself visited it; but Philemon may have encountered Paul at Ephesus during the

two years of incessant activity in which "all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." And returning home, with others like-minded, he was probably the instrument of founding the Colossian church, and became one of the pillars that sustained it. It was thus that many of the primitive churches must have been established, and thus that the Gospel was spread in the remoter districts. Is there no similar process at work in heathen lands to-day? The few instances of the kind that have lately come to light are surely earnestness of much that is unknown. Many a modern Philemon may hear the Gospel in Delhi or Shanghai, and carry it to regions of the far interior, which the feet of the English missionary can never penetrate.

Philemon had a slave, whose name, Onesimus, the "useful" or "profitable," hardly answered to his conduct. He had proved distinctly unprofitable; and he had at last run away, leaving the affairs entrusted to him in confusion, and

possibly carrying with him some of his master's property. "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought," leaves the last question in charitable doubt. But the slave became a fugitive; he fled, we may suppose, to some seaport, and from thence worked or begged a passage to the great imperial city where, as in our own London, a runaway might live for years and successfully avoid detection. "A great city, a great solitude."

Onesimus found himself in Rome; and here occurred one of those singular concurrences in which good men delight to see the finger of God. Paul also was at Rome, a prisoner, but enjoying at that time full license to preach the Gospel to all who chose to hear it. How the Colossian slave came within his influence is left to conjecture. We know that he would soon be reduced to abject poverty and wretchedness, for there was no almsgiving in heathen Rome, no hospitals or refuges, nor so much as the casual ward of a workhouse, with its

night's lodging and its crust of bread. Onesimus might steal if he could ; or, if his heart failed him, he might throw himself into the Tiber, and end his misery without any danger of interference. But there were Christian hearts now in that city. Did the watchful eye of Mark or Luke light upon the poor stranger, and did they bring him to their master? Or had he heard speak of Paul in old days at Colosse, and so was he of his own accord attracted to the preaching? He came, by some means ; he listened, and the saving words seemed meant for him ; he stayed to inquire further, and Paul took a world of pains to teach him ; and at last he too became a Christian, " My son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds." The brethren took him in, and cared for him as one of themselves ; and he returned the kindness with an eager devotion. " A faithful and beloved brother," writes Paul, specially dear to me, and unspeakably useful, one whom I

would thankfully retain with me, if it were right. A brand plucked from the burning! A trophy from the very slums of Rome to the power of Christ and of His Gospel!

A critical question now arose. Very early in their intercourse Paul must have discovered the relation of Onesimus to his friend Philemon. He was still, according to the law of the age, his slave, bought with his money, or born in his house. He was a fugitive slave, liable, if once recovered, to any punishment his master might inflict. What should be done? How should Paul, standing as he did in so sacred a connection with both men, adjust the difficulty between them?

Ardent spirits may insist that, since slavery of every kind is wrong, that slave ought never to have been allowed to return. Tell Philemon nothing; or, if something must be told, tell him that his yoke is broken, and forbid him, in the name of God, to lay it on again! Certainly, had the case arisen in our own age,

even with so good a master as Philemon, and with a slave so fortunately situated as Onesimus, no other course could have been fairly open to Christian men. But it was eighteen centuries ago when Paul was writing, and the world was unripe for the social reformations of later days. A crusade against slavery was never dreamt of then, even by the wisest and best. The early preachers of the Gospel came not as reformers, but as evangelists. They did not attack the institutions of the heathen age; but they sought to create an atmosphere throughout society in which those institutions, so far as they were evil, would of necessity crumble and decay. "In Christ Jesus there is neither bond nor free." Once let that spirit of universal brotherhood spread, and the doom of slavery would not be distant. And meantime, the exhortations came impartially to masters and to slaves in that Colossian church. "Servants, be obedient, as unto Christ;" "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just

and equal ; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven."

Onesimus then shall go back to his master, a Christian brother now, but still his slave. Paul sends him back, sorely against his will, for he would fain retain his skilful services ; but as he is about to appeal to Philemon's generosity, so he will himself act generously and frankly. "Without thy mind would I do nothing ;" without Philemon's consent, even the precious boon of freedom shall be held in suspense. Let the master have his rights, as far as he chooses to claim them. Ay, and if there is money due from the fugitive, or any charge on which he could be convicted, Philemon may press it if he will ; only let him press it on Paul, as surety for Onesimus : "I Paul have written it with mine own hand ; I will repay it."

We feel, as we read the letter, that the repayment will never be asked. We feel also that Onesimus is safe. What master, distin-

guished for "faith and love," as Philemon was, could stand out against the flood of Christian motive and appeal which flows through the Epistle? Has Onesimus, indeed, become a Christian, and that under the preaching of Paul? Is the useless and troublesome slave changed into a helpful and honoured brother, "profitable to thee and to me?" Was he lost for a season, that he might be received again for ever, and be at his master's side in eternity? Paul pleads hard for Onesimus; "receive him as my own bowels," or as we should say, "my own heart;" "receive him as myself;" "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus," I, Paul, aged and a prisoner, as if I were on my knees at thy feet, when I might stand and command thee what is right. Paul himself had a good hope of success, "I have confidence that thou wilt do more than I say." We seem to see the fulfilment of his hope. We see Onesimus made welcome by Philemon, and Apphia, and Archippus, and the whole church

in their house. We hear the eager inquiries on the one side about Rome, and Paul, and his own conversion; and then on the other side the answers, full of adoring gratitude. Prayers are offered and psalms of thanksgiving rise. And ere evening closes, we are much mistaken if the master has not spoken to the slave the magic words that make him free, "above a servant now, both in the flesh, and in the Lord."

Slavery is blotted out from the roll of our national institutions; but many a sore remains upon the body politic, and there is scarcely a relationship of our social life that does not offer its pressing problems for solution. The very relation between master and servant, utterly different as it now is from the ancient one, is yet equally difficult to regulate. Capital and labour are too often enemies where they ought to be allies. Strikes and lock-outs take the place of timely concession and friendly arbitration. Mistress and maid are sometimes

prone to mutual complaint, instead of exercising mutual forbearance, and working out a common ground of friendly and respectful intercourse. Society stands aghast at the growing gulf of separation between the one class and the other. What remedy has the Christian Church to suggest ?

The Church is not the State ; nor is it her proper office to undertake the immediate reform of social abuses. Reform is a work to which her sons delight to give a helping hand ; and from her ranks come, age after age, the foremost of the philanthropists. But her special call is not so much to remove the sores, as to renovate the constitution of the body. Now, as in the olden time, her strength lies in the proclamation of the divine love to all men, and in the practice of a human love equally broad, disinterested, and comprehensive. "Love as brethren ; be pitiful, be courteous." "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Such a spirit as breathes in these apostolic words is from above, and it is not easily naturalized in human hearts and lives. But we see it actually at work in those early Christian days; and if we have eyes, we may see it still. In its spread is the one great hope of the world. When all Christians learn to be to one another what many of them are already—what, as husband and wife, Aquila and Priscilla proved, and what, as master and servant, Philemon and Onesimus became—the dawn of a social regeneration will have broadened into day.

“ Then might we live together as one life,
And, working with one will in everything,
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live.”





XII.

THE SALUTATIONS IN THE EPISTLE
TO THE ROMANS.

Scripture Reference : Romans xvi.



S, in the main body of the Epistle, Paul appears to have been a very knowing man, so, in these appurtenances of it, he appears to have been a very loving man." Such are the words of good Matthew Henry, in his summary of the closing chapter of the Romans ; and his remark forms our fittest introduction. For in no other Epistle have we such a display of feeling. The change from the sustained argument and lofty appeal,

which went before, to these simple and friendly greetings, has something about it singularly soothing and delightful. It is like a descent from the heart of some grand mountain scenery, with its towering crags and glittering snows and tremendous gorges, to the levels of a country garden, the homely occupations of daily life, and the sweet scent of familiar flowers.

“Salutations,” or “greetings” (our translators have varied their rendering of the one original word), fill up, it will be observed, by far the greater part of the chapter before us. The term may be simply equivalent to our own ordinary message of Christian remembrance or regard. In one place, however, it becomes more definite. “Salute one another with an holy kiss.” The kiss in those countries was in itself no more significant than is the clasp of the hand among ourselves. The Ephesian elders “fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him” in token of farewell. But it early acquired a certain specific meaning in the Christian fellowship, under the name of “the

holy kiss," "the kiss of charity," or "the kiss of peace." Very near to apostolic days, we find it mentioned by Justin Martyr as a recognized part of the communion-service. "When prayers are ended," he writes, "we salute each other with a kiss; and, after that, bread and wine are brought to the president, who, receiving them, gives praise and glory to God." The custom remained for centuries, as "a symbol of reconciliation, and of forgiving all injuries whatsoever." The spirit which it breathed still survives wherever "brethren dwell together in unity."

Another mark of primitive times is observable in the phrases, "the church that is in their house," and "the brethren that are with them." They portray, as we have before observed, a state of ecclesiastical infancy, and they hint at liabilities to persecution. The Roman believers met, not in one large hall for common worship, but in scattered groups, in different private houses, in separate small "churches" or assemblies. Our Epistle would have to travel from one such

group to another, till all had opportunities of hearing it. One advantage of such private gatherings lay in the fact that they would be little likely to catch the eye of a jealous and tyrannical government. Another lay in the homeliness and heartiness which they imparted to the Christian service and life, and which, with our more finished organizations, we are very liable to lose. It would be well even now not to neglect the special means of grace which are afforded by smaller sectional meetings of Christian people. The Methodist class-meeting is based upon a true understanding of human nature. "Where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name" there may descend a peculiar glow of fellowship which is not so readily aroused in our more numerous and formal assemblies.

Before we pass under review the various persons named, a question may be raised as to how, never having visited Rome, the Apostle could possess so large a circle of personal acquaint-

ances there. The answer is to be found in the circumstances of the age. It was a travelling age ; and Rome was the centre of the civilized world. Merchants came thither to trade, scholars for education, slaves to escape detection, litigants to obtain redress, the indolent in hope of amusement, and the ambitious in quest of fortune and of fame. We have seen instances of this fact in Aquila and Priscilla, the travelling tent-makers, in Onesimus, the fugitive, and in Phœbe, the Cenchrean lady. The bulk of the Roman believers must have been unknown by face to Paul ; but there is nothing wonderful in his familiar knowledge of the twenty or thirty persons whose names he mentions, and whose characters he seems able to depict.

We have no photographs of those ancient saints ; yet, as we read, we can see them seated in their different groups, to hear what Paul has written, and we catch the look of pleasure on their faces as each name is uttered, and each greeting received. Shadows, and little more than

shadows, are they to the casual reader ; most of them with no other memorial than the mention of them here. Every name represents, however, a separate intelligent Christian soul, now, we trust, with the Lord ; and usually a vivid phrase of description helps to stamp the name upon the memory. Here, indeed, in one verse, is a batch of bare names, all unknown. One wonders what manner of men were these : “ Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.” Here is another list, with a certain sense of domestic life underlying it, but nothing more : “ Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them.” Others, again, are marked by a single term of affection or of commendation, as “ Stachys my beloved,” “ Amplias my beloved in the Lord,” “ Urbane, our helper in Christ.” But we have wider openings than these into the character, and hints of fuller information, which it may be interesting to pursue.

“Salute them which are of Aristobulus’ household.” “Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.” The original language is curious in both cases, “those out of those who belong to Aristobulus,” or, in other words, certain particular members of his establishment. Aristobulus was a name of the Herod family, and one who bore it was in Nero’s confidence, and would have a residence in Rome; and Narcissus was the name of one of Nero’s favourites. Both would have large retinues of slaves; and it is to slaves that the present reference is probably to be applied, just as in another Epistle, written from Rome, greetings are sent by “those who are of Cæsar’s household,” soldiers, chamberlains, or attendants, belonging to the Emperor himself. It was one of the common taunts thrown at the Gospel, in its earlier triumphs, that the trophies came from the ranks of slaves and of the poor.

“Salute Herodion my kinsman.” The word “kinsman” is also applied to five other persons

mentioned in this chapter. It expresses relationship. Had Paul, then, so many cousins among the Christians of his day? It would, on some accounts, be gratifying to believe it; but his use of the word is so frequent that we pause to see if it may not have a wider meaning. The clue is given in a previous passage of this Epistle, where, using the same phrase, "My brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh," Paul identifies them with his fellow-Israelites. All Jews were his kinsmen, for he loved his nation with a passionate affection; and so, in the present instance, seeking for some warm expression of regard, he applies the term with double emphasis to the Christian Jews whom he saluted, "Israelites, indeed; in whom there was no guile."

There is an exquisite touch, whether of nature or of grace it were difficult to say, in the notice of Rufus. "Salute Rufus, and his mother and mine." Rufus has been sometimes identified with the man mentioned in the Gospels as the son of Simon the Cyrenian; but the name was

common, and the persons were probably distinct. Who, and what, however, was she who had two claimants on her motherly attention? Paul had left home and friends for Christ's sake; perhaps his very mother had cast him off in scorn and anger, and refused to own him any longer as a son of hers. Here was an unnamed Christian lady, in whom the promise of Christ that such sacrifices shall not go unrequited found its fulfilment. She took in the great friendless man, and treated him like her own Rufus, acting a mother's part with a mother's tenderness. She had tended him in illness, cheered him in depression, rejoiced in his successes, and made him welcome to her home, as Peter was to Mary's home in Jerusalem. When, and where, and how, is all hidden, but the cheering fact remains; and now the Apostle honours her with filial reverence, and sends his dutiful salutations across the sea.

Here, again, are glimpses of Christian experience, which would be otherwise unknown

to us : " Salute Epænetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ," " Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." For " Achaia " in the former passage, most of the ancient manuscripts have " Asia," the term being used for the Roman province of that name, of which Ephesus was the capital. Epænetus then was probably an Ephesian, led to Christ at the time of Paul's first flying visit to that city, on his hurried journey from Corinth to the feast at Jerusalem. He must have been among the friends who met in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, and who gave letters of commendation to Apollos. He would be associated in Paul's mind with the long and laborious crusade against idolatry, which occupied his second stay in Ephesus, and with the deadly perils which marked its conclusion ; the firstfruits of his ministry there, and the pledge of all that followed. In Andronicus and Junia, we have

firstfruits of the Gospel during its yet earlier triumphs, while Paul was yet Saul, the persecutor, breathing out fire and slaughter against the very name of Jesus. Were they, perhaps, among the "strangers of Rome," converted at the great Pentecost; and had they thereafter been themselves preachers of the faith? It appears so; for the true meaning of the phrase "of note among the apostles," is this, that they were themselves "apostles," in the broader acceptance of the word, and noted for their energy and success. They were "fellow-prisoners" also; the trials as well as the labours of the kingdom they had bravely borne. But theirs was a part in that hidden history of the early Church which only "that day," towards which they pressed, and in view of which they suffered, will declare.

We cannot pass in silence by the best-known names in all the list, though they have already occupied our thoughts at length. "Greet Priscilla and Aquila." Dear and familiar friends,

tried and found faithful in so many emergencies, and through so many days of closest intercourse! Comrades, "helpers in Christ Jesus," at whose side Paul had so often sat stitching the tough hair-cloth, and, when work was laid by, had so joyfully bent in prayer! He thought of all that fellowship; but here his most vivid recollection is of some extremity of recent danger, when that gallant pair interposed at the risk of limb and life to save "the light of Israel" from being quenched in blood. Paul had a multitude of noble qualities; and he had one quality which great men do not always exhibit: he never forgot a kindness, or forsook a friend.

We must not fail, at this point, to glance round upon the group that surrounds the Apostle, as he dictates these last sentences of his letter. They are waiting to add their salutations to his own. There are his brother-missionaries, the companions of his toils and trials; first, Timothy, specially singled out as "my workfellow," then Lucius, Jason, and

Sosipater, strangers to him a few years ago, but now his very "kinsmen" in Christ. There sits the scribe, interrupting the grammar of the writing, and inserting his own greeting in his own name, "I, Tertius, who wrote this Epistle." The hospitable Gaius, under whose roof they are all gathered, "mine host, and of the whole Church," next breathes his brotherly blessing. And finally occur the names of two Corinthian Christians, one distinguished and the other undistinguished, who would seem to have come in by accident, and are therefore included in the salutation. Erastus is "chamberlain of the city," treasurer of its funds, and prominent in its affairs; and Quartus may have probably been a simple slave. But in Christ Jesus, they are on the same level; and one sentence serves to carry word from both, "Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother."

Let us step backward from the particular names and descriptions, and seek to gather some

of the general impressions which they are fitted to leave upon the understanding and the heart.

One characteristic of the passage is found in the heartiness of the commendations which it conveys. There are those who seem to hold, that either to bestow praise, or to accept it, is altogether out of keeping with Christian simplicity. Are we not, it is asked, at the best, unprofitable servants; and can any feeling be becoming to us but one of shame and confusion? No doubt that feeling is frequently appropriate. The danger is great lest we become elated with a sense of our activity, our usefulness, or our success. It is well to bear in mind, in Napoleon's words, that "no man is necessary." The Church and the world will go on whether our hand is at the plough or not. That is one side of truth. The other side is this: that the world needs us, and the Church needs us; nay, that the Lord Himself hath need of us, welcomes every earnest effort, and says of it, "Well done!" Does He then deny us the privilege of saying, "Well

done" to one another? Let the eye run down this single page of His own word. "She hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also." "Salute Apelles, approved in Christ." "Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord." "Salute Persis, who laboured much in the Lord." "Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord." "To whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." Paul was not afraid to apportion a full measure of praise to the deserving. Scarcely one of his Epistles can be named which does not begin with praise; with praise, never indiscriminate, never unmixed with warning, sometimes tempered with reproof, but always frank, and always unstinted. Let us be by all means honest and candid, where it is needful, in censuring our brethren's faults, and let us be humble in accepting censure from them. But shall not the very honesty, on which perhaps we plume ourselves, carry us impartially in the opposite direction? Let the Church have her laurels for the spiritual victor, and her plaudits

for the patient, self-denying labourer! Let our struggling brethren feel, amidst all their discouragements and drawbacks, that there are hearts in which they are honoured, and lips that speak well of them! And if, perchance, words of cordial commendation ever reach our own ears, let them be received as a gracious encouragement permitted us by Him whose grace has made us what we are!

The earnest and affectionate friendliness of these greetings is very obvious. To some it may appear exaggerated. The Apostle sits down, so to speak, among these groups of disciples, as an elder brother might, and is on the warmest terms with every one. All are his personal friends, the slaves no less than the masters, the simple "brethren" equally with chamberlains of the city and wealthy householders. "My well-beloved Epænetus," "Amplias my beloved in the Lord," "Stachys my beloved," "the beloved Persis," "Phœbe our sister," such are the terms in which one after another is saluted. The language would

be shocking if it were hypocritical, or even if it were shallow and formal. But it was real. It was only carrying out in practice the idea of discipleship contained in the other Epistle : " Treat the elder men as fathers, and the younger men as brothers ; the elder women as mothers, the younger as sisters, with all purity." Nay, what was it but treading in the track of the Master who had said, " Whosoever shall do the will of my Father in heaven, the same is my brother and my sister and mother ?"

No one would be found to urge that we have too much of that spirit in our modern churches. The ordinary remark is that circumstances alter cases, and that we cannot expect in the complex society of the nineteenth century to revive the brotherhoods of apostolic days. So much the worse, surely, for the nineteenth century ! For how many of our social and ecclesiastical troubles would pass, if that atmosphere more generally prevailed ! Invalids sit in their sick-rooms, while the chill winds of March are blowing, and try

remedy after remedy with small result; and churches confer and debate and even wrangle over schemes of reform or methods of revival. In both cases the real remedy is to be found in a change of air. A few days of bright spring sunshine, and the ailments will melt away. And so it is by the diffusion of brotherly kindness, cherished in the heart, and suffered to find becoming utterance in lip and life, that the diseases of the Church are to be healed, and that her youth is to be renewed like the eagle's.

One final thought remains. It may be urged, that with such extreme warmth of feeling some signs of practical helpfulness would be extremely appropriate. If these Christians really loved one another with so ardent an affection, what did they do to prove it? The answer is at hand. They "laid down their own necks" for one another. They "bestowed much labour" on their brethren. They threw their houses open for hospitable entertainment and united worship. They stood ready to help a foreign sister in

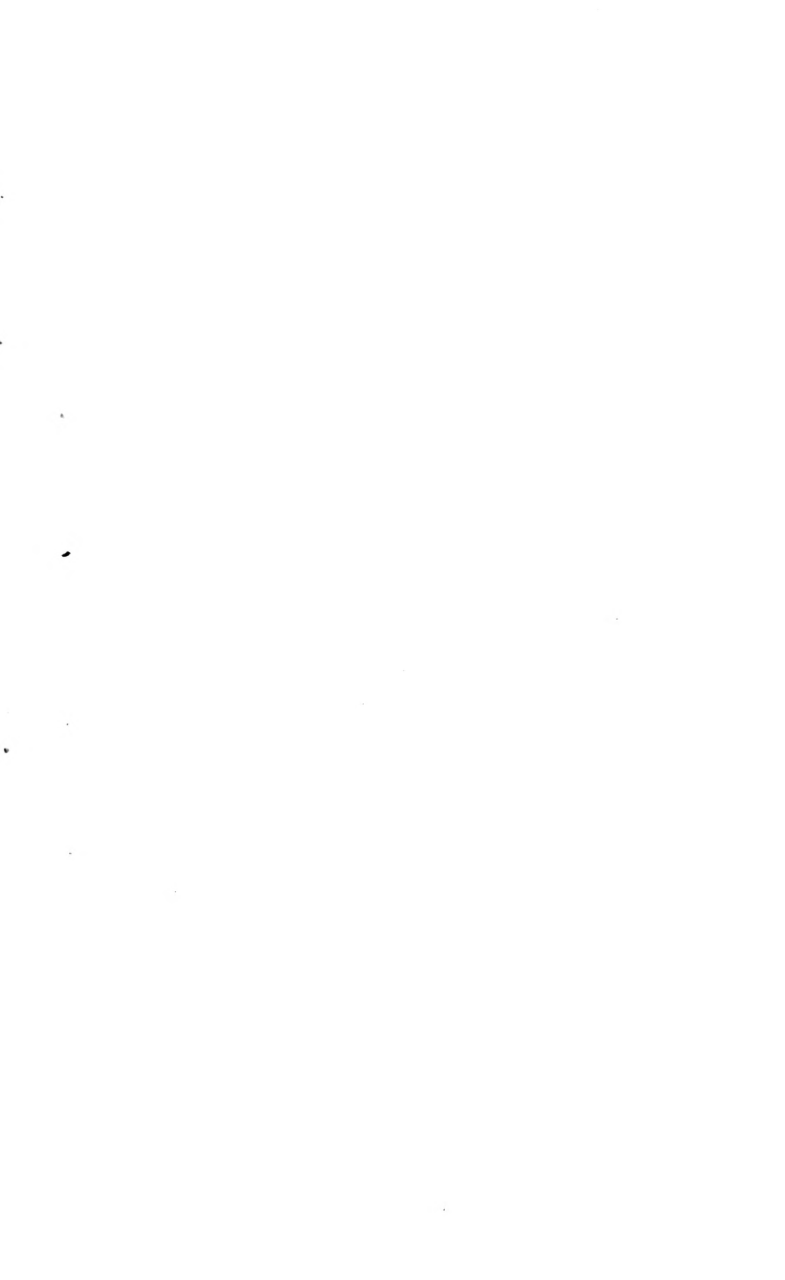
whatever business she might have in hand. The poor, the sick, the friendless, became the special objects of their self-denying care. Never was there known such a complete outworking of the law of love, as that which was presented by the early Christian churches to the astonished heathen world. That can have been no hollow profession of mutual attachment, which inspired the famous confession from their enemies, "Behold how they love one another!"

No; let us be convinced that the salutations to which we have been listening signify even more than they express. They express sympathy, which is good; they involve what is even better, strong, substantial aid. They involve food, and shelter, and steadfast companionship, and self-sacrifice, even to the death. They mean that, in this world of sin and strife, Christian people should stand by one another as brothers do, and be ready with purse and home and counsel and comfort and personal influence of every kind. "I commend unto you," the Apostle

seems to say, "whomsoever you may meet, in the manifold paths of life, in want of such succour as you have to give." The heavenly reward is waiting for every such service done to the least of Christ's brethren for His sake. The divine promise declares that the hope for a converted world lies in a Church united, not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

The salutations are ended, and the Epistle seems to close in an atmosphere of warm and genial affection. We too wish one another well. Is it not enough? Nay; there is another voice to be heard, and a more gracious greeting to be bestowed, and a dearer fellowship to be enjoyed. All would be incomplete without this concluding prayer: "THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST BE WITH YOU ALL."

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